

# **The Snow Country Hunting Life of the Northern Nobleman and the Raptor Wife 北欧貴族と猛禽妻の雪国狩 り暮らし**

## **Volume 1 - The Temporary Snow Country Life of the Northern Nobleman and the Raptor Wife**

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# Chapter 1 - A Fateful Meeting

The ball in the foreign country that I'm invited to once a year.

It is also a place where men and women search for marriage candidates.

The hall's atmosphere was somewhat buoyant. It couldn't be helped. There are not many occasions where men and women can socialise.

Leaning my back on the wall with my friend, I made eye contact with the lady in front of me.

Her blonde hair was tied up properly and her skin that was showing between the rosy pink dress was shining brightly. I presumed as I please that she would be in her mid-teens because of her ineptitude at the ball.

She was still young, but her body was already rather voluptuous. I unconsciously set my eyes on her breasts, but when I turned my sight up looking at her face and smiled her cheeks quickly dyed deep red.

— I can do this!!

It's a meaningless boast, but I have absolute confidence in my looks

My long silver-white hair, rare throughout the world, was braided and hanging down my left chest. The deep blue eyes only appear in our people, too, so although my personality may be questionable I often received praise that my eyes were the most beautiful even amongst our people.

Thus my looks were quite distinct at the ball, so just from my smile women are drawn. Next to me, I hear my friend telling me, "That's enough," but I could not care less.

It's an opportunity that comes only once a year. I can't afford let this just pass by.

But nothing in the world goes as one wants.

The lady-in-waiting behind her whispered something. Then the lady who was holding her cheeks in embarrassment quickly left.

“Ah~”

“It’s not ‘Ah~’.”

“But her bust was large.”

“You idiot! If you are looking for a bride do it more sincerely!

“I am being sincere.”

“What part of you!?”

I stare dejectedly at the back of the leaving lady.

As to why this happened, it is because of the rumours that spread during the ten years I attended the ball.

I have become friendly with ladies here and sometimes even got engaged. However, when I take them back to my homeland, they refuse, saying, “let us pretend that this talk did not happen”.

“You, you should search for a shrewd wife.”

“I don’t like such women.”

While we were talking, suddenly some cries of women were heard.

When I turned my head toward the origin of the sound, there was one officer striding through the door.

Even without doing anything, that officer was soon surrounded by admiring women.

“Heh~ that’s rare.”

“Who’s that?”

“The [Crimson Eagle]”

According to my friend's information, the person hogging the limelight was one of the more famous officers of this country. Since the war was over last year, the officer came to find a partner. Since the officer rarely appeared at balls, the women were excited.

"What, a man? I'm not int.....!"

While I was staring at the [Crimson Eagle], we accidentally made eye contact.

That sharp piercing gaze reminded me of raptors.

When I made eye contact, I was convinced. That that person is a woman.

"O, oi, Richard<sup>1</sup>!?"

Ignoring my friend's call, I maneuvered through the ladies like an insect drunk on honey.

The crowd surrounding that one officer was heated up.

"Sieg-sama, is it true that you are marrying!?"

"No!! Please marry me!!"

"No, what are you saying!?"

"Hey, don't push."

"Out of the way! I can't see Sieg-sama!"

About twenty women were pressing into each other trying to get closer to the [Crimson Eagle].

So much that they did not realise a man like myself waded through into the crowd.

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1 Ritsuharudo in raw, I couldn't really find a corresponding name. Something Germanic I guess.

More like, this country's women are rather tall. Also because they were wearing high-heels, they were only slightly shorter than me.

Even amongst them, the officer was quite tall.

Cutting through the crowd, I calmly stared the [Crimson Eagle] to talk to her.

Even up close, her attitude was impeccable.

Her vermilion hair was cut short and cleanly straightened up. Her dark grey eyes were looking at one uncommonly beautiful lady nearby. Military decorations adorned the uniform as proof of battles. That stature could only be described as gallant.

"Sieg-sama, please marry me!"

"You can't do that! I'm going to be happy with Sieg-sama!"

"Sieg-sama, if you come to my place there won't be any hardships."

To the simultaneous outburst of proposals, I also joined in.

"Um, please marry me!!"

"What are you saying..... huh?"

The commotion quickly died down.

It must have been the voice of a man that put them off.

"——Ugh, it's the Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland)!!"

With that as the signal, the surrounding ladies quickly scattered and took shelter behind the officer.

“Why is the Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland) here!?”

“.....”

That’s a bit harsh, calling me the Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland).

Amidst the chaos, only the [Crimson Eagle] kept her cool.

“Hildegard, who is he?”

“He is a foreign count, milady.”

“Pleased to meet you!”

As I cheerfully greeted her, she narrowed her eyes at me. Of course, as a display of vigilance.

“.....Well, pleased to meet you too, hm?”

“Indeed. Pleased to meet you, [Crimson Eagle]-sama!”

One of ladies hiding behind the officer screamed again. I also heard some one insult me that it was rude for the Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland).

‘The Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland)’ is a derogatory term pointing to my uncommon silver-white hair and my homeland.

My homeland, the County of Levantret<sup>2</sup>, is a barren land covered in snow half the year.

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2 レヴァントレット/revantoretto

There weren't any women who would move to such a territory. Already there are many cases where the fiancées I brought by saying that it is a good place ran away.

The sun never rises in winter, and it is still slightly cold in summer. There is no entertainment, and the population decreases every year.

It was not that there weren't any young men in my city. There's another reason for searching for brides in this foreign land.

Long time ago, our people were nomads leading reindeers around, marrying within the clan. However, because of that, the life expectancy shortened and there were more sickly children, that not many people could bear children.

Realising that, we recently started introducing foreign blood, half a century ago.

As the only child of the Count's family, I too needed to make more children so I was searching for a bride here.

Then, as I brought ladies back home and showed them my homeland, I gained the nickname 'the Snowman of the borderlands (Lappland)'.

"Was it *Yukiotoko*<sup>3</sup>?"

"N, no. My name is Richard Salonen Levantret."

"Excuse me. My name is Sieglinde von Wattin."

——N, no way, her name is so wonderful as well.

To her dazzling beauty, my eyes felt as if they were blinded.

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3 lit. snowman

Sieglinde was a woman full of vigour. I thought my heart was already hers from that sharp shine in her eyes that I did not have.

I don't know how long we stared at each other, but I came from a nearby yell.

“Get away from Sieg-sama you pervert snowman!”

“!?”

Before I knew it, some lady was approaching me with her wine glass leaning as if to pour it on me.

“Kyaa!”

“.....”

A shrill scream resounded from that lady.

A red stain seeped through her dress.

Because I had grabbed her wrist to stop her, the liquid spilled on to her instead of me.

Voices of denunciation came like a ferocious barrage. Of course, I was receiving all the criticism instead of that lady.

“Oh my!”

“How dare he soil a lady's dress!?”

“Sieg-sama, get away from him!”

“He's dangerous!”

“.....”

The lady whose dress was stained was already wailing. I also wanted to cry.

To that teary-eyed lady, Sieg gently reached her hand out for her. After she whispered something to someone who looks like a servant, and soon a maid came and took the lady away.

While I was thinking how quick she was, she also reached her hand out to me!!

Sieg-sama, to be so kind to someone who soiled a lady's dress, I am moved.

However, only icy cold words came from her mouth.

“—Shall we talk more in another room.”

“!”

.....Uh oh, am I not being treated in a businesslike manner, or rather, isn't it more like I'm being treated as a reserve soldier who committed a crime!?

Glared at with the eyes of a raptor, I silently followed Sieglinde like a livestock about to be sold at a market.

## Chapter 2 - Interrogation and Situation Report

We exit the dazzling hall and walk through the dark hallway for a moment.

According to Crimson Eagle-sama, some invited guests are assigned private rooms.

Sieglinde confidently strides through the hallway with stealthy steps. I thought she was rather tall, but she seemed to be wearing high-heeled boots. I looked on in admiration that she could walk so quickly in such uncomfortable shoes. The distance increased while I wasn't paying attention for a moment, so I picked up my pace.

After walking for a while, we arrived at Sieglinde's room. She herself opens the door and we enter. I ended up getting surprised at a room without any servants.

Although Sieglinde may be a terrifying soldier, she is still an esteemed daughter of a noble, so I asked if she was fine, but she just laughed.

"Have I said something funny?"

"No, it is just that I never had men get concerned about me. Please do not mind it."

Since she said so, I excused myself.

A faint glow of the moon lighted the room. Somehow, I felt agitated, so I lighted the candlestick on the table.

"Alcohol?"

"No, thank you."

After I was seated, I was offered alcohol but I refused. I'm not a very strong drinker, and who knows what I might do when I get drunk.

Not caring about my choice, Sieglinde poured some for herself and quenched her thirst.

I felt a bit at ease as there was alcohol involved, as it suggested that this was not a severe interrogation.

“About what you said before.”

“!”

While I was staring at her legs, those buxom thighs, she lobbed a question out of nowhere so I ended up flinching.

As I turned my eyes upward, my eyes locked with hers.

“Why did you say you want to marry me?”

“W, well.”

Her gaze was sharp, as if she were censuring a criminal.

So was it an interrogation after all..... Beads of sweat formed on my brows.

“As you may see, my appearance is a long way from a woman’s. Moreover, I do not know the etiquette wives of nobles should have.”

Indeed, her shoulders look broad and solid for a woman. She’s also tall, so it is hard to tell her sex on first sight.

However, I can’t really explain how I was drawn in by her in an instant. I know what this feeling is called, but it is very embarrassing to say it out loud.

Also, I did not even consider nobility here. Since our people are a race of people who hunt in a harsh environment. Survival is more important, we can’t afford the time to be elegant.

“In addition, I am not young.”

“?”

“..... Mother bore ten children starting from the age of eighteen.”

What’s the relation between age and having many siblings?

“Considering my age, I can’t bear that many children.”

“!”

“What?”

“No, you don’t have to bear that many. Even one child and the village will be in a festive mood.”

Sieglinde said that she is the youngest of ten siblings. As she was grown in family of soldiers, she did not receive any education as a noblewoman.

Noblewomen must have it tough. They are scorned if they don’t marry by the age of twenty.

From a quick glance, I originally expected that she would be around my age or a little younger. Of course, in high society, where women are expected to marry, she is not that young for an unmarried woman.

“Please don’t mind the age.”

“I’m 31.”

“Eh”

“I turned 31 last month.”

“.....”

— I’m sorry, I’m the younger one.

I did not expect her to be in her thirties.

Seeing me like that, she snorted.

“End of story, is it?”

She asked after she finished her glass of wine.

“!”

I came to by the clanging of glass on the table.

“But, I, too, have a story.”

“?”

Her grey eyes widened in surprise.

Regarding all the women I brought so far, they broke their engagement as I brought them to my homeland without explaining about it.

This time, I resolved to explain beforehand, so I started talking on my own.

“Our people live a life of hunting and crafting.”

Living close to the Arctic regions, our people lived a life where we coexisted with nature and reindeers.

In spring, we pick flowers for usage as spices or dyes and make dairy products from reindeers in their pregnant period. In summer, we pick the abundant berries from the forest. In autumn, we pick mushrooms from the hills, hunt wild animals and even fish for salmon. In winter we hunt the animals for their fur, and store them in the cold underground cellar.

For anything we lack, we buy from merchants and sell traditional handicrafts for money.

A long time ago, we roamed as nomads with reindeers, but a few centuries ago we were driven to our current territory and had to settle there.

After we settled as sedentary people, reindeers became livestock living in fenced areas.

Spring passes quickly, and in summer a strange phenomenon called white night in which the sun never sets the whole day.

Autumn is almost non-existent. The beautiful autumn leaves just barely fall on white snow. In winter, just breathing in feels almost as if the lungs are freezing up, and the gale is even painful. Then for two months there is period of the polar night in which the sun never rises.

“.....Well, it’s this sort of place.”

“.....”

I also added that the birth rate is low due to the repeated endogamy.

“There is higher chance that there won’t be children. The fault is all ours.”

“Is, that, so.”

I also told her about the animals in the forests: bears and foxes, rabbits and deers, and even wolves. And that some of them have white fur and cute. However, I also warn that they, as creatures living under harsh condition, are quite ferocious. Especially, when we encounter bears, we have to be prepared for death. It’s not easy surviving in the snow country.

I can’t just say ‘come along with me’ so carelessly.

Although it was I who explained the place, I ended up feeling depressed. No wonder that the ladies I brought disliked the place.

Worst case where I don't have any children, I am planning to concede my position as the lord to a wise person in the village. Since we are all kind of related by blood because of all the endogamy, I'm not too worried about the succession problem.

However, I'm alone.

My parents already ran away from home, saying, 'Are we really living here!' And then they sent some people they met during their travel back to my fief.

I'm currently living with a family of a martial race from foreign lands. I don't know where they're from, but as we can't communicate well yet, I couldn't ask where.

No, it really doesn't matter who they were.

I'm just feeling lonely. The point is, I want a family.

"Sometimes I wonder just why I am working everyday, and what I am living for. Well, it would be easy to say that it is for myself, but it's all in vain."

As a lord, I can hear out the complaints of the people, but everyone leads a busy life so one can only really trust and rely only on their family.

".....I get the story."

"....."

"I'll accompany you if it is fine with you."

"Huh!?"

Surprising, that Sieglinde would come to the frontier lands.

"R, really?"

"Do I look like I'm lying to you?"

“Why”

“It is convenient for me, shall I say.”

She too had her circumstances.

Sieglinde von Wattin was enlisted in the army from the age of 13. Thus she pledged her loyalty to the monarch and threw herself into war as she was told, but now that it was peaceful, people suggested that she should marry and sent her to the ball.

“.....I did not know how I should live from here on. My useless dignity did not allow me to just live in peace by relying on a husband.”

“.....”

“However, if it is your country, I believe I can discover my new self.”

I was excited at this sudden development, but then Sieglinde imposed a condition.

“I have one request.”

“Yes?”

“I want to us to be a temporary husband and wife for a year.”

“What might you mean.....?”

“I want to live together for a year, and then if it does not trouble you I’d like to become an official wife.”

“Why would you suggest that?”

“I have to organise my thoughts. I am sure the same goes for you. There are also some aspects we may only see after we live together. Only after we know all the ups and downs of each other, will we not be able to call ourselves husband and wife?”

“.....That is..... true.”

Thus I ultimately accepted her condition.

I'm just thankful that she's coming to the frontier. She also said to hold off child making, so I'll just be patient.

Thus we exchanged our promise, and since Sieglinde held out her hand, I also reached out and grabbed her hand.

Since it was a bit more forceful than I imagined, I became teary-eyed, but I'll just say that these are tears of joy.

「リムバ」  
(民族衣装)  
(細身)





シクランデ  
(軍服 白ver)

↑ 二つで  
リフトたさい  
のぞけ??

## Chapter 3 - A Pleasant Shopping Trip and the First Day

Since we had an exchange of a firm handshake between men(?), I thought the talks were over, but I was stopped in an awkward posture, when I was trying to stand up. The talks were not over yet.

She told me, “Sit down,” so I did so like an obedient dog.

“Was there anything else?”

“No, I was just wondering when Levantret-kyou would be returning home.”

“Five days later.”

Since this was an opportunity to spend my time freely once a year, I took care of work in advance and was spending time here.

Others seem to think that I’m a workaholic because I’m working everyday, but that’s not true. I’m busy everyday in order to survive.

The money from the state coffers quickly disappear for fortress repairs and vermin exterminations, and to make up for the lack of funds, I have to hunt animals for their expensive fur or craft traditional figures.

Thus, the ball is the only opportunity I have to spread my wings.

However, since I could not find a woman, I was planning to just relax for the rest of the time.

Hearing my schedule, Sieglinde rested her head on her hand and made a serious expression. A moment later, she looked my way, full of determination, and made a saintly smile.

“Could you come to my home in two days’ time? I would like to introduce you to my parents.”

“!!”

Indeed. Nobles require the blessings of their parents if they are to marry regardless of age. Moreover, I'm taking her away to another country. I have to explain properly and make them understand.

"Could you?"

".....Yes, of course."

I pulled up an unpleasant information from the back of my mind, that House Wattin<sup>4</sup> was an esteemed noble family that ruled over the region of Thüringen.

"My family home is located past one state from the capital. About three hours by carriage, I suppose."

"Thüringen?"

"Indeed."

Beads of sweat form on my brows. Her decorations somehow seem even brighter.

I seem to have proposed to some ridiculously high-ranking noble.

"Ah, by the way."

"Yes?"

"It is fine to talk normally around me. You may call me by my name."

".....Thank you for your kindness. How should I call you?"

"Anything is fine. You could call me Sieg like others do."

"Yes, Sieg-sama!"

".....You can drop the -sama."

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<sup>4</sup> Yes, I know it was House of Wettin in history, but it says Wattin not Wettin.

That night, I ended up questioning myself whether it was good enough over and over again.



The next day.

A letter arrived for me at the inn. It was Sieg-sama, asking if I have some time. Of course, I replied, 'Yes, surely!'

Outside, snow was piled up, but it was cute compared to our country's snowstorm.

I prepared in advance that I won't be late.

After shaving, I donned a headband as usual and quickly put on pants. I then put on a fluffy coat made of alpaca fur.

I also tied up my long hair, which extended to my waist.

For the men of this country, it was the norm to have hair cut short, so I would be considered strange to have my long hair braided like a woman.

In balls where people of many different nationalities gather, it's not so bad, but it's not the same in the streets.

When I looked at the clock, it was about time, so I headed to our meeting place.

Located in a few minutes' distance, the clock square was bustling with people. Apparently, this place where one can see the cathedral is popular for the young people here as a meeting place.

I found the tall woman with unusual hair colour without much trouble. I waved my hands and approached her.

"Sorry, did I make you wait long?"

“No, I just arrived.”

Sieg told the lady next to her, “I have company.” To attract a woman in this short while, I grew somewhat envious.

A part of me knew it already, and indeed Sieg’s civilian clothing was masculine. It was a bit disappointing that there was no trace of anything feminine.

When she asked what we’re shopping for, I replied that we’re buying necessary supplies for moving to the north.

“Ah~, but I don’t think we can find winter clothing here.”

“Is that so.”

It’s best to get clothing made out of fur, but the clothes here are for fashion.

I don’t think they would sell things for keeping warm.

“I should have asked beforehand. You came all the way.”

“That’s not true. I’m glad you invited me.”

Sieg’s troubled expression was surprisingly cute so I ended up staring at her, to which she turned her face away. Too bad.

“Then, let’s browse around and.....”

“Knives! Let’s go buy knives!”

“Knives?”

“Right. For skinning and gutting.”

We talk while walking since time is precious.

Since there was quite the crowd, I held Sieg's hand so that we won't be lost in the crowd. Her hand felt cold, so I put her hand in my coat pocket and started walking.

This country's blades are well-reputed for their sharpness, so I always bought something every time.

Chatting away, we manoeuvred through the crowd.

A while later, we arrived at a funny looking store in an old alley.

"This is?"

"A store that the butcher at the main road recommended."

I tried to open the stuck door with one hand, but since it was too hard I released Sieg's hand from my pocket and forced the door open with both hands.

The store was unmanned. The owner was probably sleeping at the back.

Full of knives and daggers on the shelves, it was a rather disturbing store. Since the shop was recommended by those who are wrestling with meat every day, I did not have no doubts on the goods, though.

"We don't just use one knife for skinning and gutting, there are many different kinds for different purposes."

"Wow."

There are specialised knives for cutting through the bones, strange-looking knives for rending the tendons, and even knives for splitting the belly. If we were to list all of them, then there would be dozens and hundreds of different types.

“Have you ever gutted an animal?”

“No.”

“Yeah? I think this might be good for beginners.”

I grab a big one that was lying around.

This beautifully curved steel knife has many applications, from finishing the prey to butchering. Since it's big, it can also be used for cooking outdoors.

Sieg held it up in one hand and spun it around before putting it into a leather case.

“It's a good product.”

She seemed to have liked it, since she decided to buy it.

Since I was also planning to buy something, I grab a knife that was on my mind, a thin knife with a curved blade at the tip.

“What is that for?”

“For scraping out the intestines of a bird.”

“.....”

Sieg was making an indescribable expression, but I bought it anyway since I would no longer have to dirty my hands if I had this.

After that unsettling shopping trip, we strolled through the streets for a while.

On our way, Sieg stopped me to go into a toy store.

“What are we buying here?”

“A little something of a game.”

“?”

Following her, I arrived at a place dealing with cards and other games.

“My count, do you see anything you like?”

“Um, nothing in particular.”

“Is that so, milord.”

Playing master and servant for some reason, Sieg explained each game earnestly.

“You really don’t know anything.”

“Mm. Well, I didn’t have a playmate, or should I say I didn’t have the time for it.”

“.....”

I then realised at the toy shop that I had barely any memories of playing.

“There weren’t any kids my age, and I had to work from a young age.”

When I mumbled that, I felt somewhat empty.

My first friend too was a foreigner I met in high society.

“Ritzhard Salonen Levantret.”

“?”

For some reason, Sieg bowed her head reverently and held out her hand.

While I tilted my head in confusion, the crossdressing onee-san smiled wider.

In that state, what came out of her mouth was not anything too special.

“— May I have the honour of being your first playmate?”

“!”

It was about our relation.

I finally realised that she was worried about the gap in culture and customs between people of different countries. That maybe she suggested that we be 'temporary spouses' because of this.

It's fine, being just playmates in a relaxed atmosphere. We can progress from there on.

I held up her outstretched hand and gripped it tightly once more before letting it go.

My eyes grew teary like last night, but I dismissed it as just bone pains.

## Chapter 4 - A Tense Carriage Ride and House Wattin

It's been three days since I met with Sieg. Today I was to visit her family home.

As the whole ordeal was decided in a hurry, I had nothing but a wooden figurine of a polar bear, but since I had nothing else I decided take that along as a gift. It was originally at the village store, but since it didn't sell I retrieved it. I was planning to give it to my friend or something.

At the coach station, an exceptionally excellent carriage pulled by four horses awaited.

Since I heard that the coat of arms of House Wattin had yellow and black stripes with a crown-like streak, I was sure that the carriage in front of me was today's ride.

The coach driver then saw this bumpkin and descended from his seat, and said, "You are expected, sir." Since he opened the door so courteously, I ended up blurting out a sorry.

"Good morning."

"G, good morning, my lady!"

Sitting with her legs crossed, Sieg greeted me crisply. Because my heart wasn't ready for some reason, I spoke respectfully.

It's the second time I'm with an older woman, but I'm not yet used it. I sat askew from, a strained expression on my face.

I was agonising over how I should spend the next three hours, but I seem to have forgotten that I had quite the easy personality. As soon as the carriage started moving, we started talking.

The topic was about the frontier we were going to live in, Lappland.

There were some history and customs we needed to go over.

In the harsh environment, the people have worshipped the spirit from a long time ago. However, not many believe in the spirit today. Although young people still pay their respects, they try to not learn bad habits.

That bad habit is 'not helping others so that one can survive in this harsh environment.'

Because of this word of the spirit, the villagers only rely on themselves and their families, and rarely interact with others.

Though there is such a custom, the villagers become festive when a child is born.

A new life is said to be a precious blessing from the spirit.

When a child is born, the villagers bring good food to that house praying that the child will grow healthy.

There are many young people thinking, 'aren't these two teachings of the spirit contradictory?' but it could not be helped since it was an ancient tradition.

Also, there is another amazing thing regarding the spirits.

It's the family of a martial race that my parents brought ten years ago.

I don't even know where they are from. I can't communicate well with them, but they still work as servants at my house.

Apparently, they lost their homeland so went into exile, but my parents convinced them to come to the frontier.

They also worshipped the spirit. Though of course it was a different spirit.

Once, I tried my best to learn their language and culture, but to no avail.

They did not use language very much to communicate.

They express themselves through gestures. Pounding their chests, holding up fingers, and so on. It took a few years to understand those gestures. However, they only conveyed simple things, so I couldn't form complex sentences.

I kept talking about such stories during the ride.

Thankfully, Sieg listened carefully without looking displeased.

Suddenly, she stared at me, so I wondered what it was.

“Ah, I was just wondering if you braided the hair yourself.”

When I affirmed it, I received praise.

“Well, this is also a part of spirit worship, should I say.”

From ancient times, they said that there is a mysterious power in the hair. By keeping it long, it supposedly protected people from disasters.

Well, there is that teaching, but it’s unexpectedly warm when you wrap it around your neck.

“Have you tried growing your hair?”

“Come to think of it, I never tried it.”

So I recommended that she try growing out her hair, to which she laughed refreshingly, saying that it might be a good idea.

While we were chatting like this, the three hours passed quickly.



The region of Thüringen which House Wattin ruled was a serene place overflowing with greenery. The trees that surrounded the city was dyed white in snow, creating a beautiful scenery.

After walking down the lane for a while, I saw a large mansion. The mansion of House Wattin.

Sieg said that she was returning after five years. The servants also looked happy to see her.

While we were waiting in the drawing room, one of the doors opened with great force. A boy in his mid-teens entered the room.

Upon seeing Sieg, the boy was then all smiles.

But what came out of his mouth was baffling.

“Hey, granny! Is it really true that you’re marrying?”

“.....”

“.....”

When I turned to Sieg out of worry, her eyes had the usual raptor-like glint.

Fortunately, it didn’t seem like anything too bad.

“Claus, you are in front of a guest. Sit down.....”

“Just what sort of rich person marries this old maid.”

“Claus, behave yourself.....”

“It’s that right? The guy’s remarrying or like fifty years old.”

“Claus, sit down.”

“Huh, wait, by marriage partner did you mean this girly-haired guy here!?”

“I told you to sit.”

“Why, bro. Were you threatened into..... Uwah!?”

The boy’s body leaned forward, and in an instant he went face down onto the ground.

It’s because he ignored Sieg.

Thankfully, there was a soft rug on the ground, so I don’t think the impact was too bad, but Sieg proceeded to suppress the boy with one knee and twisted his arm up.

“Ow, it’s bending, it’s going to bend, ouch, ouch!!”

“It’s not bent yet.”

“Ow, it’s going to bend!!”

“.....”

Hearing the boy’s pleas, Sieg let him go.

Still lying face down, he grumbled.

“M, meathead hag.....”

“Shall we talk in a private room, Claus.”

“..... No.”

“Just follow me,” said Sieg as she dragged the boy away.

Few minutes later.

“—Hello, pleased to meet you. Claus von Wattin, at your service.”

“..... H, hi.”

“I spoke thoughtlessly a while ago. I apologize.”

“..... It’s okay.”

The boy was reeducated within minutes.

He is Sieg’s older brother’s son. Apparently, he visited his grandparents’ house because he was on vacation.

While I was having small talk with Claus, I was notified that Sieg’s parents will arrive soon.

As he left, Claus looked at me awkwardly.

“Um, Levantret-san.”

“Hm?”

“I was very rude. I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. Don’t worry.”

“.....”

The boy bowed deeply and left the room. During the conversation, he looked a little frightened of Sieg, so I was worried about what kind of education he received in the private room.

“I apologise, my nephew Claus has been rude.”

Sieg apologised for her nephew’s actions.

“There was a period where he lived in the city, so I think his behaviour is partly my fault.”

“It’s okay. Don’t mind it.”

She seemed close with her nephew.

Sieg still looked apologetic, but then her parents came in so she stopped apologising for the moment.

I was nervous about this meeting, but it turned out that Sieg's parents were very kind-hearted.

They understood my situation and did not oppose the marriage.

Also, thankfully, they gladly accepted the polar bear figurine.

The meeting was unexpectedly uneventful. I was scared that I might be hit by her father, but everything was well.

"Then, may I head there two months later?"

"I'd like to say, 'you're welcome anytime,' but I think it would be best if you came during early spring."

"Well, if I am to live there, the seasons don't matter that much."

"..... Well, that is true."

I remembered being told by a previous fiancée that this was not a place for people to live.

Still, I did not wish to force it on her.

If she says that she can't live there, I'll give up cleanly.

"What is it?"

"Nothing."

Thus it was decided that Sieg will come two months later.



My time at the Wattins' mansion passed quickly.

“Then, see you in two months' time.”

Saying farewell, Sieg offered her hand for a handshake.

Since it was the third time already, I ended up getting cautious.

I wanted to get back at her a little, feeling mischievous.

“I'm looking forward to our next meeting, ojou-san (fräulein).”

“!?”

Holding both her hands tightly, I kissed her on the cheek and got on the carriage before she could voice a complaint.

From the window, I could see Sieg dazed, pressing her hand against her cheek.

I waved my hand in farewell.

I returned home as I looked forward to the time after two months.

## Chapter 5 - To Greet My Wife

The first thing I did upon returning was cleaning up the room mother was using so that Sieg can use it.

Because my mother has a small frame, I thought Sieg won't be able to use mother's clothes so I moved them to another room.

Though she couldn't live a luxurious life because she married such a poor count, I at least prepared all the necessary furniture.

I bought from the village carpenter a desk, a chair, a dressing table and a bed, all painted red. Because I felt uneasy from the bright red room, I laid a white on top of the desk and put white rabbit fur on the chair. I did likewise for the other furniture, balancing it out with white things.

On the floor, I spread a carpet weaved from a foreign country. It was a product that had fine circles weaved in on a grey base.

After I finished preparing the room by changing the curtains, I started preparing the clothes.

For the coat using reindeer fur, I took the one I had at home and commissioned it to the tailor. For the shoes I made them myself using white reindeer fur. I prepared three pairs for now.

I usually wear traditional clothes made with toughened cloth by fulling wool.

With cloth dyed vivid blue as the base, I sewed red cloth and yellow cloth on to embroider various patterns around the sleeves, chest, waist and the hem. Around the chest, I lined it with fluff material and fastened it with silver clips, creating an article to ward off the cold.

Women wear long skirts, and men wore hip-length ones, fastening it with a belt.

One thing that was similar for both men and women was that we wore hide trousers underneath.

I hesitated about the length for Sieg, but I decided on an intermediate length in between men's and women's length.

While I was preparing for her, her letters arrived quite a few times.

She wrote unexpected well. I received polite letters on her recent state about once a week.

When I sent her finished shoes and clothes, I received approving letters in response, that I carelessly ended up putting more energy into preparing.

Then two months passed in a blink.

It was finally time for Sieg to arrive in my country. I decided to go meet her with one servant.

It takes about two days to get here by boat. I have to go meet her at the only ice-free port in the country.

It takes a little longer than five hours to the port with reindeer sleighs. Since the reindeer needs to rest a day, we started moving from the day before.

When it was almost time for the boat to arrive, there were many people. I too waited with my servant while pointing towards the faraway boat.

Soon, the boat arrived and passengers who just finished the long trip disembarked.

The pier was overflowing with people within seconds, but I soon found her.

“Sieg!”

“!”

The woman wearing a mantle covering her from her shoulder to her hips saw us and waved her hand in reply.

Because of her muffler and the fluffy hat, I couldn't see her face clearly. However, seeing her approach me gallantly, I heaved a sigh of relief.

I offered her words of encouragement for the two days trip, and sincerely welcomed and thanked her.

Then I introduced her to my servant.

“A member of the martial race family I mentioned before. Her name’s Miruporon Ponu Rango<sup>5</sup>.”

Sieg looked up at the servant that was taller than her.

Her light brown skin and her lustrous black hair seemed to be their racial trait, since the whole family had the same colours. Her face was chiseled like a brave lion and she had strong hands and feet, seemingly having an affinity for gaining muscle.

Miruporon was the smallest in the family, but still she was a head and a half taller than me or Sieg.

Her arms and legs were well-muscled from chopping wood everyday, and her sharp eyes were ever alert.

“She’s sixteen years old and her hobby is caring for the reindeers, I suppose?”

Because she cares for them wholeheartedly, our reindeers’ coats shine. I could even boast them as the most beautiful reindeers in the village.

Miruporon was taller than me and Sieg. She might grow even more since she’s still growing.

I somewhat realise that I might have been able to see Sieg as a woman because I was surrounded by such a tall family.

“Miruporon, this is Sieglinde.”

“.....”

---

5 I’ll just go with rōmaji spelling here. Post any suggestions you have. Raw: ミルポロン・ポヌ・ランゴ

Instead of naming herself, she pounded her chest with her fist.

This is the gesture they use most. The meanings are consent, reply and gratitude.

“She’s my wife.”

“.....”

I hold up my index finger and point at Sieg. Starting with the thumbs, it means father, mother, child.

“Meronmeron, madau? (Great king, mother?)”

“No, not madau (mother).....”

We couldn’t communicate clearly again.

I only know that Meronmeron refers to me.

I gave up on conveying the relation between Sieg and me, and started explaining the schedule from here on.

“I know you’re tired from the long trip, but we’ll be leaving here soon.”

“Ah, I don’t particularly mind.”

Sieg said that she was okay even if we left right away.

As to why I am in such a hurry, it takes five hours, and if we go in the evening the ferocious cold will attack us. I explain that I want to finish moving by the evening.

I show her the route with a map while telling her about the rest schedule, and leave the port.

At the outskirts of the city, I pick up the reindeer that I had entrusted to a hut with a fee. They seemed to have had plenty of rest and were quite energetic.

“So this is a reindeer?”

“First time seeing them?”

“Yeah. Amazing. Very big and neat.”

Throughout the world, white reindeers are rare, and they don't live anywhere else. Seeing the reindeer having white fur to the last strand, Sieg's eyes glinted.

“If anything happens while on the sleigh, blow on this and the reindeer will stop.”

I gave her a small wooden whistle. I told her to have it on her mouth in case of emergencies.

“Also, there's a bell on the railing, so if you lost the whistle ring that.”

“Roger that.”

The sleigh is made up of a single-seater driver's section and a two-seater luggage compartment. The whistle and bell are to contact each in case of various unexpected situations like the link coming loose or falling off the sleigh.

I loaded Sieg's luggage on the two-seater compartment fastened them tightly. Then I ordered Miruporon to get on.

“Sieg, you should sit in front of her. Then you probably won't even fall off.”

Miruporon spread her legs apart and beckoned Sieg to sit. Sieg too saw that and sat in between her legs.

After checking one last time, I ordered the reindeer to move.

Kicking the ground, the reindeer advanced through the snow-covered fields at will.



The scenery was pure white.

The roadside trees grew shorter as we proceeded to the plains.

After an hour of travelling, we stopped the sleigh for a rest.

In front of us was one of the cabins that could be found throughout this region. They provide resting spots for merchants.

After checking up on Sieg, I led the reindeer to the hay-filled hut.

I also thanked Miruporon for protecting Sieg daringly, and spoke out to rest at the cabin.

“Excuse me mister, I would like meals for three people.”

“.....”

Without saying a word, the man from the cabin disappeared into the back of the room.

Since the people of this country are very wary and shy of strangers, that kind of response is normal. Talking about things like that, we sat down on the chairs in front of the fireplace.

“Riding a sleigh was quite surprising, right?”

“No, it was quite fun.”

“Really?”

In Sieg's country, the mainstream vehicles are roofed carriages. When I asked if she were okay out of worry for riding in an exposed vehicle, I got back a positive reply.

After we chatted a while, the meal came. Of course, it was mister's handmade meal, but paid.

I pay up and then start digging in.

In front of us, there was a modest meal of reindeer soup, black barley bread and some cheese.

Because our body tries to heat themselves in this cold weather, we use a lot of energy.

If we don't replenish ourselves we'll tire ourselves out quickly.

Reindeer soup is quite endearing.

Seeing Sieg sip the soup, I ask just in case.

"Is it okay? Can you eat it?"

But Sieg said that it was tasty.

It was a moment where I felt relieved that I picked such a dependable wife.

## Chapter 6 - The Crimson Eagle

Our trip proceeded without any any problems, rather unexpectedly. Even when we passed three forest cabins, Sieg did not show a single sign of being tired. I was in awe. She was indeed a person from the military.

At the third stop, we had a meal. Although we were only sitting, it still used a lot of energy. Even if we didn't feel hungry, the food went down quite well.

Here we asked for meals (\*paid) from the old man here, but what we got were six thick slices of black barley bread and six flat round slices of cheese (\*for three people). Drinks were served as well, but they were cold, so I got this indescribable feeling.

From the three cabins we stopped at, it was the most expensive, but the meal was the plainest, so yeah.

Accepting the reality, I then thought of ways to make the meal as tasty as possible.

I stuck the cheese on the skewers which were on the table, and grilled them by the fireplace. Within a few seconds, the cheese melted and the surface was glossy. Then I put that on the bread and gave it to Miruporon. I made another one for Sieg. At the second time, Sieg melted the cheese. When I told her that it tasted better because a women made it for me, she smiled bitterly. I was saying the truth, but maybe she didn't believe me because of my casual manner.

After we finished eating, I spread out the map and started explaining the route from here on.

"In about two hours, the sun will set so you might want to wear another layer underneath."

"Does the sun set that fast."

"You'll be surprised?"

In winter, the sun sets a bit past the afternoon. Furthermore, it's a scary region where the sun won't rise for the two following months. Sieg's grey eyes open wide in surprise, as she made a serious expression.

“So when we get out of the forest soon, the temperature will fall below zero. So we’ll be stopping every fifteen minutes to check.”

“Check for what?”

“Hypothermia.”

Hypothermia. It’s a symptom that appears when people could not keep their temperatures normal in cold environments. The body temperature continues dropping, causing derangement until all vital activity stops. People call this death from exposure.

“When we ride out with reindeers in the village, people sometimes die like that.....”

As I explained, I couldn’t continue. Sieg looked at me worriedly, but I couldn’t find the words to explain these welling emotions.

“.....Sorry, Sieg.”

“What are you talking about?”

“To die while moving, I just realized that this was not usual.”

“.....”

I grew up in the village thinking only of family, and when they left I lived in an environment thinking solely of myself.

Realizing that it was the first time that I was in charge of someone’s life, I realized once again the gravity of the matter.

From my arbitrary decision, I might have exposed someone’s life to danger.

“I was so excited about the marriage, that I didn’t realize how dangerous it might have been for Sieg’s life.”

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me.”

“.....”

Sieg says so, but there are no guarantees.

Last time I brought a fiancée over, it was from spring to summer. And it only took about one hour by reindeer from a nearby port.

That port is currently closed because the sea was frozen.

“.....I really should have brought you at a warmer season.”

“——Let me tell you a story.”

“Eh?”

“It was about eleven years ago. When I was still in my teens.”

“?”

Seemingly ignoring my uneasiness, she stares far away and starts talking about her past.



Five years since she enlisted, she was assigned to an elite corp that would be sent to the very front lines. They trained strictly everyday, tempering themselves everyday.

As she was doing so, it became the season for the mountaineering training that was had once a year.

They were to spend a week at the summit of a mountain that still had a thin layer of snow.

Having only meals for a week and the minimum equipment, Sieg said that it was the most avoided training.

“We silently climbed the steep slopes, but after five hours something happened.”

With a sudden downpour, a gale strong enough to prevent people from standing assaulted Sieg’s platoon.

Exposed to the elements and unable to move, the platoon commander decided on abandoning the luggage.

A short climb later, they found a mountainside cabin so the platoon headed there.

“Sooner or later the rain and the wind will stop. That’s what everyone thought.”

However, the storm did not let up for four days.

“The food ran out as well as the firewood. On the fourth day, the rain turned to hail and started punching holes in the roof.”

In that tragic scene, some people started being unable to maintain their consciousness.

“In retrospect, it might have been hypothermia.”

“.....”

Help did not come on the fourth day.

On the fifth day, the weather cleared up but only Sieg and one other person could move by them.

“A fellow soldier suggested to get some food outside. Back then, I couldn’t make calm judgements, like staying still in the cabin, or waiting for help to come while putting a noticeable white flag out, because of the hunger.”

Snow had piled up outside the cabin. However, it was not too difficult to move so they decided to traverse the snow-covered fields.

Even though they searched the mountain, winter was over so there was nothing to eat. While they were at a loss, they discovered something.

“It was a big deer. My comrade swiftly took aim and fired a bullet.”

From well-trained moves, the bullet hit the mark and the deer collapsed.

As if the fatigue he had was a lie, Sieg’s comrade ran gleefully to the deer in a straight line.

“However, the deer was not dead. When he approached, it immediately charged into his stomach.”

The deer only fell from surprise.

Sieg fought back with a knife.

Because she was really in the mood to get that deer, it was fortunate that she had that large and hard knife to mortally wound the deer on the neck and the abdomen.

“When the deer finally fell, I was covered in blood. But there was a bigger problem.”

The comrade who was attacked by the deer was bleeding from his nose and was knocked out.

“I was agonizing over whether to take the deer back or my comrade back. Now, I would unhesitatingly bring the deer, but back then I was not yet fully ruthless.....”

Ultimately, she carried her comrade back and gave him first aid.

“Not having the courage to go out alone, I waited for rescue to come while being exposed to the wind and snow in the dilapidated cabin.”

The rescue unit came half a day later.

“Seeing me covered in blood, they thought for a moment that I killed a comrade in confusion.”

Thanks to Sieg talking to her comrades and giving accurate treatment to the wounded, everyone managed to return home alive.

For that, Sieg received a reward from the country.

‘The Adler (Eagle) Medal’

The eagle represents courage and strength, and the medal was rewarded to people with outstanding performances.

“The story of me getting covered in deer blood and the eagle medal mixed up, that when I went out again I had already got the baseless nickname of ‘the Crimson Eagle.’”

I was curious about the origin of the nickname ‘the Crimson Eagle’, but since it might have been rude I had not yet asked. I felt satisfied that I could hear the story now.

“.....Well, the story got long, but just who is the count worrying about.”

“Eh?”

“Who do you think is in danger of dying?”

“!!..... That Sieg might die from hypothermia.”

“Do I look like I’ll die?”

“..... No, not a bit.”

She stayed conscious in a snow-covered mountain in early spring when all the men collapsed, and she even fought a deer. I really couldn't imagine Sieg blacking out while moving on a sleigh.

"I told you? I'll be fine."

"....."

To her very convincing words, I couldn't help but nod.

By the way, that was the story of 'her most terrible incident in her military practice'. When I imagined that there could be more terrible stories, I really couldn't describe how I felt then.

## Chapter 7 - Heirloom and Oath

Nothing happened during the five hour long ride and everyone arrived safely at the village, so I felt relieved.

There was a towering structure in front of our eyes, an old fortress.

The village is surrounded by a tall stone wall.

This is recorded to have been built three centuries ago using the national budget, because of the severe damage from pests.

The reason why there is such a nice fortress is not recorded, but one could tell that the lord back then was a trusted man.

However, after three hundred years, the facility deteriorated quite a bit that most of the village funds went to the maintenance of the fortress.

After thanking the reindeer for its work, I checked on the women seated behind.

“We’ve arrived. How are you feeling?”

Sieg said that she was fine very dependably. Miruporon pounded her chest, gesturing that she was fine.

“Now then, this is a problem.”

“What is it?”

“The sentry isn’t here.”

In front of the main gate, there is an outpost for the sentries, but seeing that no light came out of the building, there clearly was no one insider.

Again..... Sighing like that, I laid my hands on the steel gate. I ordered them to always bolt the gates, but to be opened without me doing anything..... my head hurts.

Pulling the reindeer along, we entered. Past the gate there was a narrow passage leading to the hallway, but even here the steel bars I ordered to be lowered at all times was raised up.

While being dumbfounded, I exited the narrow passage and arrived at a place that had a counter and a barred hallway. And of course no one was waiting. From the room behind the counter, energetic voices flowed out.

I rang the bell on the counter, but no one came out. Since no one came out even though I waited patiently, I ended up yelling at them to come out.

The door behind the counter opened with great vigour, revealing the merry banquet inside.

“Sorry~ We’re closed~”

“What do you mean you’re closed you fool!!”

“Oh my, if it isn’t my lord.”

“.....”

“Oh, that a guest of yours?”

“.....My wife.”

“Good gracious!”

The man announced that the lord got a new wife, to which a bunch of red-faced men turned around.

“What? Wife!? Which one!?”

“The huge one’s the martial race lass, eh?”

“No, both are pretty huge.”

“You can’t really see her as a women on first sight.”

“You can’t even if you look closely.”

“.....”

These people running their mouths off are soldiers dispatched to this village from the city. Their usual task given by the country is gatekeeping and checking for pests from the watchtower.

However, these soldiers never worked seriously. Since only these kind of people were dispatched here from grandfather’s generation, they say ‘it’s our loss if we get bothered by it’.

For them, getting ordered to protect this village from thieves and wolves may be tantamount to being told that they’re excluded from the actual fighting. In other words, this place for them is like a place for relegation.

“M’lord ~ no other good ladies, eh?”

“Hey, stop that. Isn’t he pitiful?”

“A~nyhow, she looks like one tough woman.”

“Cold and poor, all the women of this village are tough. Haah, there’s nothing good here.”

They spoke in the language of this country. It was fortunate that the meaning did not get across to Sieg.

The steel bars were still down. Since these doors were opened from inside the counter, I told them to do so so many times yet they did not open the door.

Having lost their interest, the drunkards left except one.

The reindeer was sneezing behind me.

Oh yeah, it’s quite cold here.

“Ah, my lord, can you lend me a knife? I want to cut some cheese but mine’s rusted.”

“.....”

The improperly dressed man showed me his issued knife.

“See, it’s got like this. It can’t even cut cheese.”

“Okay, fine, but raise the bars first. We’re all tired.”

“Knife first~”

The man taps the desk, demanding the knife.

Since it couldn’t be helped, I drew the biggest knife on my belt and swiftly stabbed the desk with it, sticking it between the man’s index finger and middle finger.

“——Hii!!”

The sharp knife stuck right in the small gap between the fingers, even piercing the desk.

The red-faced man suddenly fell silent, as though he became sober instantly.

“So, how about now?”

“Wa, the door, I’ll open it, right away!”

“Please.”

Not much later, the door opened and we could proceed to the passage leading to the village.

I moved on, dragging along the reindeer that was puffing out white breaths as though it had a cold.

From a while back, Sieg followed without saying anything. I felt sorry for showing her these unkempt soldiers.

“Haah, I’m sorry. They’re quite the rabble.”

“No, it doesn’t really matter, but who were they?”

“Dropouts from the regulars.”

“.....”

Until now, my impression of a soldier inside me was not good, but meeting Sieg it was changing. However, it was quite severe that showing her that made me feel embarrassed.

To stop thinking about depressing things, I thought up brighter topics and talked about that.

“By the way, what happened to your uniform? Back at home?”

“No, I returned it to the military, but why?”

“!?”

I turned pale with surprise at the knowledge that I could no longer see Sieg in uniform. Apparently, they are managed carefully so that no one abuses them.

“Is there anything wrong about my military uniform?”

“No, I just wanted to see you wearing it again.”

“What do you mean by me in my uniform.”

“You were handsome in it, so I wanted to see it again, more calmly this time.”

“.....”

Sieg looked at me sharply. Seeing her wary eyes after a long time, I shuddered somewhat.

“Sorry for saying a stupid thing. It’s cold, so let’s get going.”

When we exited the fortress, we were greeted by a short tree that grew in these snowy fields. The ice crystals that looked like flowers still reflected light faintly in the dark.

Walking through the snow, we could see red brick houses lined up.

From some of the houses, warm light leaked out that it created a dreamlike mood to the village.

Here, there are 70 households, about 400 people.

The major industries are traditional crafts and meat and fur from hunting. We attract tourists over, but in this season the nearby port is closed so we don't earn a lot.

The people who visit are people from Sieg's country and people from the island country to the east. So in this village, in addition to our language, we learn the languages of those two countries from a young age.

"Ah, Sieg, look at that!"

"?"

At the pitch black sky, a thin streak of light appeared so I pointed at that.

"——This is!"

The faint light soon spread across the sky, drawing a sapphire coloured curtain.

Foreigners call this phenomenon 'aurora'.

Tourists come all the way to these parts just to see the auroras.

"My, how pretty."

“Really? I’m happy.”

“I’ve heard the rumours, but this feels otherworldly.”

It seemed that Sieg saw the aurora as pretty, so I felt relieved.

By the way, since auroras could be seen almost every day, they weren’t too rare for the inhabitants. Frankly, I feel more thankful when the sun comes out.

“Here, we don’t call it aurora, but call it a foxfire.”

“Heeh. What’s the reason?”

“According to old folklore, the tail of a large fox hit a hill, and that exploded, creating fires that became the aurora.....”

And House Levantret has been bestowed these raiments of the sky from the king. The name means ‘foxfire’ in the ancient tongue.

Other nobles are bestowed various goods from the king, but House Levantret was bestowed one that was unreachable. It was a rather pitiful story, that a poor noble family that did not even have a heirloom were forced to administer these lands.

However, Sieg said that it was a good treasure.

“This is a treasure that was protected by the people of House Levantret.”

“Really?”

“Yes, without a doubt.”

In this village, we do not have any marriage ceremonies like foreigners. There are no oaths and exchanges of rings that are done outside.

There really isn’t anything here.

“Sieg.”

“What is it?”

So, I thought it important to say something.

Though it was somewhat embarrassing, I faced her and said it.

“I vow to do my best to make Sieglinde happy,” I said.

That was the greatest oath I could say to her.

Since there weren’t any houses around, I couldn’t see Sieg’s expression in the dark, but I felt as though she was smiling.

And then I came back to reality from the sneeze of a reindeer.

There’s no time to be staring at the aurora. I told her that we should hurry since it’s cold, and we arrived back home.



## Chapter 8 - A Warm House

In the middle of the town, there is a large stone surrounded by trees.

“Sieg, this stone here is the spirit of this village.”

The surrounding snow was cleaned by the elderly people and on the spirit stone there are offerings of fur and silver jewellery.

The Spirit Shiieiti<sup>6</sup>.

For us who were scorned as ‘the chased ones’, our indigenous faith acts as a pillar of support for many of us living in this harsh environment.

I kneeled down on one knee to give a prayer of thanks for a safe trip. Sieg to did the same to show her respect.

The name Lappland was a derogatory term meaning ‘land of the chased ones’, scorning the people here. The elderly people loathe this term, and despise outsiders for taking away their nomadic life. Then they started calling ourselves ‘Sami’.

Having been robbed of their only property the reindeers and forced out of from the land to deal with those reindeers, the villagers did not let strangers approach and lived by their own strength.

Having settled a few centuries ago, the Sami people were said to have been living by the teachings of the Spirit.

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6 Any good ideas? Rōmaji for now.

However, two generations ago, my grandfather realised that this closed society was not good, so he argued for a new way of life, leading to our current lifestyle.

The elderly people dislike this change, but there are many in the village tired of the old customs.

My grandfather said that if we were to continue this secluded life, we would eventually face extinction.

There were such circumstances, and also there was the thing that we must prioritise accepting foreigners.

When we passed the village, the scenery changed to a white snow-covered forest of pine trees again. As we walked while lighting the way with a lantern, we could see a two-storey mansion made of red bricks.

It's small compared to Sieg's, but it is my proud house.

Opening the fence gate, I showed the way to Sieg.

"Welcome to my house!"

"Aa, I'll be in your care."

After we finished our little exchange, I led the reindeer to the hut and filled the feeders with clean water and dry moss.

"This is the hut for the reindeer. Further inside, I slaughter live animals or gut hunted animals \_\_\_\_"

While I was explaining the hut to Sieg, the slaughterhouse doors opened vigourously.

“!!”

“.....”

A large shadow appeared in the dark.

Seeing Sieg hold her breath, I hurriedly explained.

“Sieg, it’s alright.”

When I directed the lantern towards the object that appeared in front of us, the shape of a person was revealed. Well, it’s not too surprising that Sieg became wary. He was wearing the hide of a white bear on his head.

“He’s Teoporon Ponu Rango. Miruporon’s padau (father)”

“Is that so.....”

He cut out the head part and wore it on his head, while the forelegs extended to his arms. Around his waist, a white hide flapped like a cloak, while he was naked except for a thin layer of black trousers. It was a sight that one would definitely say ‘that definitely looks cold’. His body is very big. He is tall, and it was as if he were boasting his muscles.

In addition, the fur he is wearing is one he got from the forest five years ago, when we encountered a bear that was acting as the king of the forest. He took it down with only a spear. At that moment, I really was prepared for death.

This person lives by taking care of the weapons in this house, as well as cleaning and hunting. When I’m hunting large animals, I can’t do it without Teoporon’s help.

“Teoporon, she’s Sieglinde. Wife, not madau (mother).”

“?”

“A cherished woman.”

“?”

It was futile trying to convey that she was my wife with just actions. I thought was embracing her and kissing her on the cheek, but since there might be fundamental differences in showing affection I decided not to.

Meanwhile, Sieg named herself and pounded her chest with a fist. Teoporon did the same.

As expected of Sieg, should I say. It’s an interesting scene. Even with Teoporon in front of her, she did not look fazed.

Then Teoporon looked this way and spoke.

“Great king. I am happy that you returned safely.”

“.....Yeah. Thank you.”

I couldn’t understand what he said, but imagining it to be words of welcome I responded half-heartedly and pounded my chest with a fist. Teoporon nodded with satisfaction.

“And Sieglinde. I give you my welcome as the warrior protecting the great king!!”

“.....”

“.....”

It felt as though he was saying whatever he wanted, but since I don’t know the language I just smiled meekly and went inside.

In front of the entrance, we brushed the snow off ourselves and I opened the doors for Sieg and Miruporon. Then I gave her slippers to put on.

In the carpeted room, I felt calm surrounded by the warm atmosphere. I took Sieg to the living room and offered her a chair.

I sighed in relaxation as I settled in.

In the living room, there was a table and chairs for four people, a large fireplace, a large white deer hide on the floor, and mounted trophies of hunted deer heads.

Sieg spent the time silently, looking tired.

A while later, warm drinks were served.

Served in ceramic cups, the red liquid is a drink called glögi, a type of berry juice with spices. It's an exotic drink, but it warms the body quickly.

I also introduced the person who served the glögi.

"Sieg, she's Ruruporon. Teoporon's wife and Miruporon's mother."

When I introduced her, she was making a motherly smile.

She's in charge of cooking, serving great food every day.

But her size is bigger than mine. Still, even with those big arms, she makes the finest food in the town.

"Ruruporon, Sieg is my wife."

"A special woman."

“Hm. Got through maybe.”

Ruruporon pounded her chest and held up a finger, telling us that the meal would be ready soon.

“They’re a cheerful and lively family.”

“Indeed.”

It was a series of hardships, interacting with a family whose lifestyle was completely different from mine. However, they’re all hard workers, and though it’s a little hard to feel, a warm feeling could be felt.

I didn’t want Sieg to suffer too much from the difference in culture. Because I was thinking of that, I handed to her two books that I had prepared in advance.

“These are?”

“This book has information on the customs and the way of life in this village. The other book is for you to write if there’s anything you think of.”

I told her write things that are too hard to say to my face, or things that she got curious of.

Though my interaction with her was short, I could tell that she was somewhat quiet, having the personality to not say her thoughts out loud.

“An exchange diary, huh.”

“If there’s anything, please don’t hold back.”

“Okay.”

While we were talking, Ruruporon came back with food.

She has wild looks as though she might just serve raw meat, but her cooking is exquisite. Furthermore, she prepared the traditional food of this village.

Few carved round wooden bowls were arranged on the table.

A thick reindeer milk soup with smoked salmon, with plenty of spices. It could be said that it's an extravagant food in this season where we can't get reindeer milk. We need to buy the milk from merchants for an expensive price.

There were also reindeer skewers with sour sauce made from strawberries picked in summer. The boiled potatoes are served unpeeled, and the tough black barley bread are thinly sliced. We eat them with bird liver kneaded in spices.

The warm cheese was stretchy and tasty. The meat went well with the vegetables as well.

"Sieg, how is it?"

I asked Sieg who was taking a bite out of reindeer meat.

Of the tourists who visited, there were many who disliked reindeer meat.

"Very delicious."

She slowly chewed on the meat and wiped her mouth elegantly with a napkin. Afterwards, she told me her thoughts.

The first night passed pleasantly and merrily.

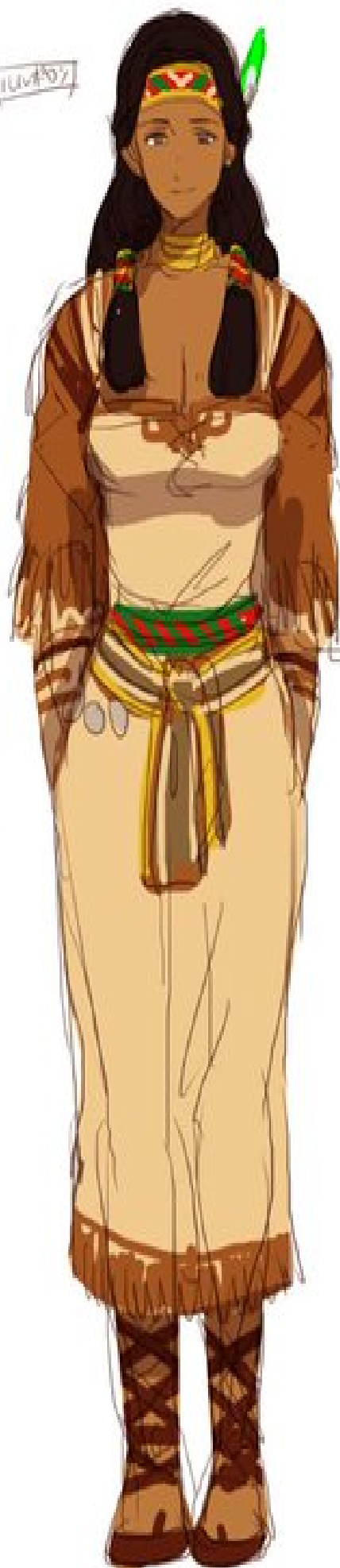
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## Chapter 9 - Snow Country Life Day One

The morning of the Snow Country begins in the dark hours like that of night.

Maybe because I was tired from all the moving yesterday, I slept soundly. Rising from my bed, I put on a coat before I lit the lantern using the fire from the fireplace. I put out the remaining fire with a poker.

I changed and moved to the washing basin.

The house is surprisingly warm. It's thanks to the special fireplace in the kitchen. Adjoined to the wall, it acts as a stove while it warms the house through corridors of heat that penetrate the house. It uses a lot of coal, but it is necessary to overcome the arctic weather.

I wash my face and brush my teeth. I also combed my unkempt hair and tied it. In the mirror, I saw a sleepy face, so I slapped myself to psych up.

When I went to the living room-cum-dining room, Sieg was already there.

"Good morning, my husband."

"Good morning, my wife."

I'm happy that I could have normal greetings in the morning. Unfortunately, the martial race family has no custom on morning greetings.

I really am happy that I married.

Sieg was apparently spending time with the book I gave her yesterday. She asked some questions about things she was curious about.

Since I sat next to her, I stared directly at Sieg.

It's the first time I examined her clothing calmly. The deep blue clothes complemented her orange-red air. I wanted to see the length too, but since she was sitting now I couldn't.

"What does this mean?"

"Ah, that's."

Sieg's face was drawing in closer, but since she was focused on the book she did not mind me a little bit.

I was a little depressed at the fact that she did not noticed me, but there were good things.

Her nose has faint traces of freckles. One would not be able to notice them without examining up close, so I felt strangely happy.

"——So, about the ownership marks on reindeers."

"....."

"Is there something?"

"!"

Because I was looking at her clean earlobes and was not paying attention, I reacted late. To disguise that, I let my eyes to dart.

Sieg did not point out my suspicious behaviour and asked again.

"Ah, sorry. What was it?"

"I want to know more about the marks on the reindeers."

"Ah~ the ear markings."

To protect them from pests, reindeers are grown in one large fenced area.

Since all the reindeers of the village are there, we mark their ears to show ownership.

We carve markings with our own knives. Every family has their own distinctive pattern, so that everyone could tell whose reindeer it is.

“All the reindeers?”

“Right. If someone finds one that doesn’t have a mark, then the finder can mark it and keep it.”

“I see.”

Listening to me carefully, she wrote down notes neatly.

While we were talking like that, breakfast was served.

Glutenous potato pancake, a simple soup of root vegetables, spices and venison, milk soup wrapped in thin black barley, and roast boar with spices. A heavy meal for the start of a day.

Since this was natural for me, I was quite surprised when I only got bread and coffee for breakfast.

Other women I brought were displeased that they did not need that much food in the morning, but Sieg did not complain, saying, “looks delicious” and started eating.

A woman from the military indeed. Seeing her eat so well, I ended up falling for her once more.

After breakfast, there is a little break.

I decided to tell Sieg today’s schedule.

“Today, I’ll lead you around the village, and we’ll end the day with a hunt in the forest.”

It was a pretty hectic schedule for the first day, but here we need to work like slaves everyday.

A bit later, we went out.

First, we headed to the village, which now looked very different from yesterday as it was bright now.

At the town square, kids were playing. It's a game where one person bends and puts a reindeer antler on the head, while others try to capture that using ropes.

Sieg looked perplexed when she saw that.

Well, of course. That is indeed an exercise for capturing reindeers, not a normal game.

"Ah, it's the lord ~ ~!!"

"What is it? Did you come to play with us again!?"

Having noticed us, they ran over here. I hug and lift them up to check their growth. When I said that I didn't come to play today they looked disappointed.

"Huh ~ there's someone we didn't see before ~"

"Oh yeah ~"

Seeing Sieg, the kids looked fascinated.

"She's my wife. Trying talking to her in the foreign language you learned."

The kids as lovely as fairies hung back, staring at Sieg.

Sieg squatted down and spoke.

“Hello, aren’t you cold?”

“H, hello!”

“It’s not cold!”

“That’s a relief.”

Everyone spoke and looked happy that they could communicate with her.

I then led her to the only store in the town and introduced her to the owner lady, also from Sieg’s country. I told Sieg that she could rely on the owner if there’s anything she’s troubled about.

There’s also the inn and the restaurant, but since tourists don’t visit in this season they’re closed.

Afterwards, I brought a dog sled, equipped a knife on my belt, got some ropes and a hunting rifle and went out.

Since the snow piled up heavily in the forest, I equipped wooden boards on my feet and glided across the snow using poles.

After we travelled through the forest for a while, we arrived at a wooden fence.

“This is the forest of the reindeers.”

This fence extends across a very large area. This too was built by our ancestors, with carvings of the Spirit’s words to ward off pests.

There are feeders where the forest ends. Here the villagers put feed in every day.

Reindeers can dig up moss under the snow using their hooves. But since there weren’t enough from the wild, we were giving them extra food.

As we walked, we came across a reindeer.

Since there is some distance, it was way of us.

“Let’s try catching it.”

Sticking the poles to the ground, I hand the rifle over to Sieg and get the ropes.

I spun the rope, aiming for the antlers, and threw it.

The reindeer was caught without much resistance. However, not all reindeers are this docile. Some are very aggressive, so ropes are always necessary.

I pulled the rope and beckoned the reindeer over.

“Ah, this one has an owner.”

I could see a mark.

“This one is marked quite conspicuously.”

“Yeah. But the reindeers don’t feel much pain.”

We strolled a little more in the fenced area and left.

Finally, we stopped by the forest to hunt.

I only took one dog to pull the sled, and ordered the other one to wait.

In the forest, there are rabbits, lynxes, boars, deers, foxes and even bears. Since there aren’t that many that have white fur, we put a restriction on them so one has to report if they caught one.

“We have to be careful of bears, but they don’t appear in these parts.”

The animals with white fur don’t usually hibernate. They’re said to be living in places with streams of water, but for some reason they can be found here as well.

Being omnivores, they sometimes hunt medium-sized animals like deers and boars, but they also eat fish, barks and berries.

While I was talking about bears, an animal jumped out from the shade.

“Ah, a rabbit.”

Murmuring that, I lifted the gun up and pulled the trigger.

The two bullets hit its head.

The rabbit wasn’t white. It was one that had brown fur, but had white spots on its belly.

Rabbits are the tastiest in winter. The fur is soft too, so it gets used for hats and gloves.

I put the dead rabbit in my leather sack.

It takes about four days to let it ferment. If I am not careful about it, the gas will gather inside, spoiling the taste.

Then I searched the forest for more, but since the sun started setting we decided to go back home.

## Chapter 10 - The Couple's First Work Together

By the time I arrived home, the sun already set that it already felt like night, but the time was still afternoon.

I brought the dog back in to the hut, and left the tools to Teoporon who happened to be passing by.

I then took the rabbit from Sieg's hand and placed it in a dry bowl. Then I gathered some snow using the leather bag, and placed that on the rabbit's belly.

The rabbit is then left for about three days in this state, after which we finally butcher it.

"You are not removing the blood?"

"Yeah. In winter, rabbit blood tastes good."

In this season, rabbit blood smell especially nice. Since we cook using it, we do not necessarily drain the blood. However, if it's left without removing the blood, gas builds up inside so we use snow to keep it at a suitable temperature for the first stage of preserving.

Since Sieg said that she will go in the house, I finally could go to the storeroom.

Inside the hut, there are unbutchered animals stored. I need to butcher the rabbit I hunted the day before yesterday today. On that day, I had hunted five animals.

Soon, the days when the sun does not rise will come. Since it's dangerous to hunt in the dark, we have to hunt as much as possible to make more preserved food and earn more money, so things will get much busier from here on.

The hunt today was not too good, but sometimes there are days where the hunt fails altogether so I did not mind it too much.

When I came back out, Sieg was still waiting for me. She said that she can't go into someplace warm on her own. She's really chivalrous.

Upon entering my house, Ruruporon serves food as if she had been waiting for us.

There was quite an amount for lunch as well.

Braised and spiced rabbit meat on top of mashed potatoes. Served in a deep wooden plate, meatballs in berry sauce. Bread is black barley bread as always. Maybe because it was toasted this time, the slices were thicker than usual. Baked to a beautiful brown shade, the mushroom soup pie was something that provided bliss when one bites into the crunchy crust and thick cream. Baked in cheese, the white fish melted delightfully in the mouth.

Sieg highly praised the food, that it was tastier than her country's.

Since my house's food was the only source of pride, a grin formed on my face.

Though they're made from expensive ingredients acquired from merchants, I decided that I will not spare money to make tasty meals.

"What will we do in the afternoon?"

"I'm thinking of butchering the rabbit I hunted three days ago."

Since it felt bad to teach her how to butcher when she just came yesterday, I told her that she can do anything she wants.

"Then, I'd like to see you butcher."

"Ah, is that how it works?"

“Free time does not sit well with me. If there’s something else that need to be done, you can tell me.”

“No no, nothing else.”

Miruporon takes care of chopping the firewood, grooming the animals and cleaning, and Teoporon takes care of the tools and the storerooms. Since the kitchen is Ruruporon’s sanctuary, even I, the master of the house can’t enter.

Even if she asked for other work, there really isn’t any work that she could do.

In the end, she accompanied me.

After digesting the food, we went out.

I took out a rabbit that had been fermenting for three days in the storeroom to the butchery.

“Today, I’ll be butchering the rabbit I caught the day before yesterday.”

“Okay.”

I thought it might have been nauseating for her to see me butchering a four-legged animal so suddenly, but since there was no other suitable animal, I decided to do it sincerely to respect her wish.

On the wall, there are almost a hundred knives. Most of them are from my grandfather’s collection. Since Teoporon cleans them regularly, they all glint brightly.

“This one maybe~”

I picked out a small knife.

It's enough to use just a knife to butcher a rabbit. I took a familiar knife from the wall hook and put it on the worktable.

When I turned around to face Sieg, I saw her remaining composed.

Though the room is kept clean, the smell of blood does not go away quickly. On top of that, Teoporon had just taken care of a big one yesterday so the smell lingered.

When I asked her if she would be fine, she nodded and replied that she will be fine.

Since I had finished the final checks, I decided to start processing the rabbit.

“First we rend around the calcaneal tendons.....”

I carved both parts and grab the hind legs while sticking the knife in preparation for skinning.. From there on, I slid the knife in the thigh and continue to the buttocks. Once I reach the buttocks, I carefully started removing the skin.

“Here you have to be careful to not touch the testicles.”

If one ends up touching the testicles, the smell will permeate the meat, ruining it.

After that, I boldly remove the skin using strength and technique. The navel has barely any meat, so I have to take care not to ruin the blade. Finally, the skin is easily removed by pulling the skin while holding on to the waist.

“.....Well, this is it.”

“Looks easy, but it must be actually be hard.”

“Hmm, I wonder. I think it depends on how dextrous one is.”

Butchering animals is a skill I learned when I was young. When I was shown how they processed birds, I was so shocked that it haunted me in my dreams. It's a bitter memory.

"As for the skin, I have to let it boil in herb water, but that's for later."

Skinning is the most important part. Pelts are important for daily lives, so failure is not acceptable.

After I retrieved the pelt, I continued on to gutting.

I disembowel the naked rabbit, taking care to not slash the urethra. The blood doesn't get washed away easily so cleaning doesn't matter. I took out the internal organs and sorted them out.

Then I knifed many different parts to cut off the head.

Once I cut off the two forelegs and the two hind legs from the body, the butchering is over.

"Once we ferment this for one more week, we can then eat."

"That is quite long."

"Yeah."

As she watched me butcher three rabbits, Sieg said that she wanted to try butchering the last one, so we carefully took care of the last one together.

Realising that our first work together was butchering, I regretted that I should have done something more monumental.



Nighttime.

I slowly dipped into the bath Miruporon prepared.

Eating and bathing might have been the only joy in life.

But now it's different.

I couldn't wait to talk with Sieg.

I had been eating alone until now. It's strange that food tastes better when there's someone to share it with.

After I finished bathing, I had dinner, then Sieg would invite me over for games. Of course I accepted, since I did not have anything more to do.

On the living room table was the product we bought at the toy shop.

The game was to be played with black and white pieces on a square-shaped board.

The players take turns placing the black and white pieces on the board, surrounding the opponent's colour and ultimately the person with more of their colour wins<sup>7</sup>.

I played many times with Sieg, but I couldn't win even once.

"One more time!"

I started off casually, but I soon started getting serious. Even then, I couldn't win.

".....I lost again."

"Well, there's the difference in the playing time."

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<sup>7</sup> Reversi (or Othello)

The game is from Sieg's country. Since she played it from a young age, she knows all the tactics too.

Since Sieg started yawning, I decided to stop here for today.

“.....I'll win tomorrow.”

“Challenge accepted.”

Sieg did not let up even in games.

## Chapter 11 - Sieglinde's Activity Report No. 1

Eighteen years of military service.

Who knew that I would marry one day.

I was forced make this fateful decision a few months ago.



After the long war ended, I spent time being chased by work. One day, I was called by my superior.

Albert von Hertling.

The man who happened to be my uncle, my mother's younger brother, was waiting with a mysterious expression.

He was the one who summoned me, yet he was continuing to hesitate. When I was wondering what he wanted with me, he said the unexpected.

He asked that if I have considered marriage.

I was dumbfounded at those words. As marriage meant retirement for a female soldier.

Most female soldiers in my country retire by their mid-twenties. Most find their partners early on and leave the army.

When I asked why, he replied that he wanted me to know the happiness of women.

However, I persisted for more details, that I successfully made him tell me everything.

He whispered that the reason was that his two daughters were infatuated with me.

My cousins Hildegard and Anna-Maria were attached to me from a young age.

Hildegard is already twenty one. An age well past the suitable age for marriage in high society. Anna-Maria is still fifteen, but it seemed that she was insistent on marrying me.

Having an old father's face, my superior bowed his head. He pleaded me to marry and have a peaceful life, to follow the path that his daughters seemed to have given up on.

Frankly, I was never that attached to the army. If you asked me why I was in service, I would have replied that it was because I liked moving about and that my whole family were in the military. A simple reason.

Since I had no attachment to this work, there was no reason to not agree when my uncle was bowing his head to me.

In the case I could not find a marriage partner, he said that a place as a teacher in a military academy would be guaranteed.

The summon that day ended with me thinking that I would be reemployed at a military academy since I would not find a marriage partner.

When I sent a letter asking my family to look for suitable partners, I received an enthusiastic reply that I should go to the ball in the palace this season. Thinking that they may have been still resentful at me for rejecting a marriage interview in the past, I briskly gave up on any hopes of support from my family.

Instead, I received a frilled dress that fit perfectly. However, when I imagined myself in it, I got the chills.

I realised it when I saw that lady's outfit. I do not have the capacity to become the lady of a house.

Someone said it once. That a female partner should be docile and obedient.

An ideal lady would assist one's husband to her fullest.

She would drink tea with other ladies, and for hobbies she would embroider or appreciate art. She would spend time and money on beautifying herself, while perfectly handling social exchanges in high society.

However, having grown among male siblings, I did not hold back when it came to pointing out faults, and I was not very talkative. Embroidery and art was an unknown world, since I never did it. I did not feel like going to a fancy ball.

I never thought I would be able to perform such an impossible feat called marriage.

Then, the evening of the ball arrived.

I passed up the deep ocean blue dress that mother picked for me and put on my military uniform.

Talks of my marriage already turned into a rumour and had spread in high society. Since it would be troublesome if someone gets the wrong idea that I would be a docile wife from me wearing a dress, so I armed myself to a certain extent.

Also, I put on decorations and medals that I have never worn before.

This was to threaten anyone who was related with the military.

I had no confidence that people would not get furious or envious at me. I could not guarantee that there would not be anyone that would wish to feel prideful from dominating me.

I at least thought that people would not approach me from my decorations.

Men are proud creatures.

It is disgraceful for them to bend their knees to someone with more decorations than themselves.

I rarely tidied my hair, but since it was a ball in a long time I trimmed my hair and combed my fringe to let it down to the side.

I felt perfect, that no men would dare court me.

.....However, ultimately, I failed miserably.

I was surrounded by many people the moment I set foot into the hall. Most were women asking for my hand in marriage.

Well, it was completely my fault though.

I was surrounded and had no idea what to do. To avoid reality, when I turned my eyes away from the ladies, I coincidentally made eye contact with someone a little farther away.

That person had an otherworldly appearance.

Under the chandelier, the white hair shone beautifully in silver, and the eyes were blue and clear like sapphires. The long hair had been braided. It was like the illustration of 'the snow fairy of happiness' that I saw in a fairytale.

As my cousin tugged at my clothes, I looked down momentarily. I looked back at that place again, but that person was already gone.

I had thought that it may have been an illusion I saw.

However, that was not an illusion.

The snow fairy had for some reason came up to me, and even asked my hand in marriage.

The surrounding ladies shouted that he was 'yukiotoko'.

My blank head could not process the meaning.

The suitor that had an appearance like an imitation was, on closer examination, a man.

He was properly wearing this country's men's evening dress, but because of the mood I did not realise it earlier.

He was a count from another country.

His name was Ritzhard Salonen Levantret.

To escape this unfortunate commotion, I decided to use Ritzhard.



After we went into a private room, Ritzhard was truly docile.

I was also interested in him being called a snowman, but since he did not have an appearance matching that name, I ended up staring at him.

From his story, it really seemed that he really wanted to marry me.

However, I could not possibly become the lady of a foreign count.

From a rough estimate, I saw him to be in his mid-twenties. On the other hand, I am already thirty one years old. I was called as 'a mutton dressed as a lamb' by my nephew some time ago, so maybe he saw me as a young woman.

To keep the talk short, I told him my age from the beginning. However, he did not look as though he gave up on the marriage talk.

I also told him that I may not be suitable as a wife, but he did not mind a single bit.

While I was thinking of ways to make him give up, he unexpectedly started telling me his story.

That Ritzhard Salonen Levantret is an impoverished noble from a snow country.

Originally, his people led nomadic lives, but because of invaders they were driven out to a land where people would normally not live in. They are the last remaining natives of their country.

He told me that they were a people that hunted and crafted, living in harmony with the land.

He did not expect anyone to come to such a harsh land, and he confessed that he proposed out of hope that I would be able to endure it.

I accepted his strange behaviour as coming from his upbringing, from living somewhere so close to death.

While I was listening, a strange change of emotions visited me.

I started thinking that those remote lands that he was talking about may be the only place to live as I am, without having to force myself to change.

I agreed on a conditional marriage. On the condition that we are to be temporary spouses for a year.

## Chapter 12 - Sieglinde's Activity Report No. 2

As to why I suggested to be temporary spouses for a year, I did so thinking that even Ritzhard would realise it.

My body, personality and even my appearance is very different from normal women.

Once we started living together as husband and wife, I had expected that he would realise that 'something is not right'.

I did not mind what he said, but for now I needed a place to hide until my cousins married.

In addition, if the land fits me I can settle there.

Although I may not be able to become a good wife, I could become a reliable inhabitant.

But before that, we parted ways for a while since I needed to meet my parents first to discuss the schedule.

After I returned home.

I had thought that the problems I had were solved, but I could not relax well for some reason.

Although it was on a tentative contract, I still did decide on marrying rather hastily.

I realised that even I had some sensitive parts.

I hear that there are many loveless marriages in the world. There also seemed to be many couples that maintained a friendly relationship even without love, but I was not sure if I could manage such a feat.

I kept questioning myself whether everything would go well just because our interests coincided.

Furthermore, we grew up in different countries, in different environments.

The knowledge I learned from my service in the army may not do me any good in the Snow Country.

When I thought of those things, I felt somewhat sorry for him.

In the end, I greeted the next morning without getting a wink of sleep.

I wanted to get rid of the anxiety by meeting Ritzhard before I left, so I sent a letter to the place he was staying at.

Even though it was a sudden call, the snow fairy gladly accepted my request.

When I waited at the meeting place, he appeared right on time.

Even in the streets, Ritzhard stands out. For better or for worse.

His kind-natured smiles were very elegant, but in this country where people do not smile often it made him look rather frivolous.

Since he said that he wanted to shop for necessary goods for his life in the Snow Country, we left the square.

There was quite a crowd. When I was about to speak out, he took my hands and put in it his pocket without saying a word.

I did not know how to react to his sudden action, but his intent was soon revealed.

He turned back while saying, "There's an amazing crowd of people here," with a troubled expression. Then he said, "Your hands, weren't they cold?"

He was wading through the crowd as if to protect me, and he let me in first saying that it was cold.

He was treating me like a princess.

As I spent the day with him, my anxiety was almost gone. I felt that this marriage could work.

However, just in case, I told him that we should start with being 'friends'.

I was not used to being treated like a woman, that it was a strange feeling when I was treated like that.

The next day, his introduction to my parents ended without much trouble, and it was decided that he would spend the rest of his days in this country until he returned home.

While he was staying in my family's house, I heard many stories from him.

Ritzhard's fief's environment<sup>8</sup>, culture, history and daily life. They were all very interesting stories, that our time together passed by quickly.

On the morning of the last day, I greeted Ritzhard goodbye.

When I stretched out my hands for a handshake, the man in front of me said something unexpected.

—"I'm looking forward to our next meeting, ojou-san," he said.

Where is this 'ojou-san'. That was the first time I was called like that.

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8 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fief>

I could not believe what I heard. Meanwhile, my outstretched hand was enveloped in his hands.

While my attention was diverted to those warm hands, something was forced on my cheek the next moment.

Believe it or not, Ritzhard kissed me on the cheek.

Without out a doubt, he was making a face like a kid who successfully pulled off a prank. “This insolent man!” when I looked at him with such thoughts, his face was dyed lightly in red, as he smiled shyly.

I was as a loss for words.

Ritzhard dashed into the carriage, and waved goodbye as he departed.

I will be meeting him in two months. Now marked the start of long days.



Since my marriage was settled, mother started making unnecessary preparations.

She called over my second oldest brother’s wife, who was strict about decorum.

I told them I did not need to prepare for anything since they were hunters, but no one listened.

Starting from that day, I underwent a hellish training.

Embroidery, etiquettes for tea and dining. Making baked desserts for guests and wearing dresses.

Until I could get everything perfectly, the studying did not end.

Unexpectedly, I had quite the talent for handicrafts.

The handkerchiefs I embroidered, one handkerchief a day, all received passing marks.

I made about thirty of those. I was told that I should gift them to his relatives as a show of appreciation. The handkerchiefs I made became a part of my bridal gifts.

The day I became free from my sister-in-law's sessions, my nephew Claus came again, during his vacation.

As soon as he saw me, he said, "male crossdressing granny". As usual.

Just a month ago, I told him to do something about that mouth of his, but as soon as I took my eyes off him he went back to how he was.

However, since it was that I was crossdressing, I did not say anything.

The next day.

Since I was to marry, I was told that I should stop dressing like a man from my father, so I decided to put on the dress my mother gave me.

When I asked my parents how I looked, my mother replied, "You tried your best," while averting her gaze. Father said, "I acknowledge the effort you put in," while averting his gaze as well.

Really, what rude parents. My brother and his wife had the same reactions. I did know that dresses did not look good on me, but my family still took care to not hurt my feelings.

However, I felt even more hurt from those easily readable attitudes.

Then, my badmouthed nephew Claus marked the highlight.

He called me "female crossdressing granny".

I did not mind 'male crossdressing granny'. It still made sense.

However, 'female crossdressing granny' made no sense. Not at all.

I grabbed Claus by the nape and lectured him for about an hour.

Soon afterwards, it returned to being 'male crossdressing granny'.



During the following month, I felt restless.

Even though I went out shopping with mother and my sister-in-law, and went out for tea with other ladies, nothing stirred my heart.

My only joy was the letters I received from Ritzhard.

His sentences were bland, but he sent over the clothes he made and even fur shoes.

Meanwhile, my former colleague from the army proposed to me, and was pleaded by my cousins to not go, but there were no changes to my plans.

I arranged for the luggage to arrive before me, so I left with only one bag with me.

Two days since I left my homeland, I finally arrived at my husband's place.

As I heard from the stories, it was a very cold place. Since there were so many people at the pier that it blocked the way out, I took the time to change into the fur coat Ritzhard sent me.

Animal hair is unexpectedly warm. I was surprised by the difference.

Ritzhard, whom I was meeting after a long time, was still looking like a fairy without any worries. Seeing him welcome, I felt somewhat happy.

The cold in the Snow Country that was rumoured to kill was milder than I imagined it would be. When the wind blew, my exposed face did hurt a little, but it was not unbearable.

Like so, my Snow Country life started. Unlike what I feared, the days were rather pleasant.

I felt weird every time Ritzhard called me 'my wife', but I was spending my days happily.

Although the temporary couple life was just beginning, I was excited over what new experiences I would have.

Every day passed smoothly with each day being filled with new experiences.

## Chapter 13 - Reindeer Hunt

I roved through the white snow-covered plains with my reindeer.

Today was a bad day, with a strong headwind. The wind was especially more sharp.

Pulling the sleigh, my reindeer was chasing a wild one.

A merchant who visited the village told me, so I came out on a hunt.

There were three reindeers. While being wary of us, they were striding through the snow-covered plains.

I urged the reindeer pulling the sleigh to go faster. After accelerating for a while, I finally was at the same speed as the wild reindeers.

Seated on the sleigh, I aimed my rifle to the wild reindeer's head.

However, because of the cold, I could not get a proper grip.

The hand supporting the barrel was shaky, and the trigger finger was also trembling in the cold.

To stop the gun from shaking, I drew the gun closer to my body and concentrated on the target.

The first bullet pierced a reindeers back.

I unconsciously clicked my tongue as I took the empty cartridge out and reloaded the gun.

Surprised at the gunshot, the wild reindeers sped up.

We were still moving at the same speed, but the placed I aimed at before had shifted to the position of the reindeer's belly button.

I took aim once more. The target this time is the heart.

I was concentrating more than the last time, but the second shot was misguided.

I shot a third shot in desperation, but it only pierced empty space.

The reindeers escaped us at full sprint.

“Damnit!”

I had confidence in my proud reindeer’s legs, but it still lost the the stamina and leg strength of wild animals.

However, if I attempted to approach them to shoot them from the get-go, the cautious reindeers would run away at full speed from the beginning. There also aren’t any that would charge this way.

Eventually, my reindeer seemed to be getting tired, because the sleigh was gradually slowing down.

When I was about to blow the whistle to give it some rest, the sleigh suddenly tilted.

“!?”

Because the sleigh collided with a chunk of ice that was like a rock, the sleigh bounced, which caused my body to be flung out.

It was good that I managed to throw away my gun in a momentary decision, but I failed to put my body into a better posture.

Worst of all, the snow piled up only a little, that the ground greeted me with hard and cold sheets of ice.

When I stopped tumbling, I was lying on the snowy plains.

The smart reindeer had already stopped its movements before I ordered it to.

I failed my hunt, and I fell out from the sleigh. It also hurt. It was the worst possible mood I could feel. Cursing, I punched the ground.

“Ritzhard!”

I heard Sieg shouting from afar.

To signal that I was fine, I waved my hand wildly.

My waist still hurt as if a nail was driven through it, but since I would just end up worrying her if I stayed lying on the ground, I slowly stood up.

Sieg was riding a sled pulled by four dogs. Just as she came close, she jumped off before the sled came to a halt. Because of the remaining force, she rolled gracefully on the ground before she ran up here.

I greeted my wife in a sitting position.

“Are you alright!?”

“Yeah, I’m alright.”

“You’re bleeding on the face.”

“Eh, really?”

I thought my face hurt because of the wind, but it seems that I hurt my face while I was tumbling on the ground.

Sieg took out a small bag from her coat pocket, and took out some cotton balls and wiped the blood from my face.

As some first aid, she cut some soft cloth and fastened it to my cheek with some medical tape.

“Let’s return for today.”

“.....”

I hesitated at Sieg’s suggestion.

I did not hunt a thing today. It was unsettling to return empty-handed.

“There are days like these.”

“Ye~ah”

“Do as I say!”

“.....Yes.”

Because she insisted so strongly, I decided to return for today.



Even after I returned home, I still felt clouded.

In this period of the year, I easily grow anxious for results.

As to why I was like this, it’s because the period when the sun does not rise was approaching.

This period lasts approximately two months, but last year it lasted 72 days. The year before, it lasted 57 days, and the year before that, it lasted 40 days. It changed every year.

We called this phenomenon where the sun did not come out the polar night.

During the polar nights, it gets dark everyday, so we could not hunt.

The only food sources we could rely on become merchants and the preserved food that were made during the bright season.

Thus, the villagers spent the still bright hours securing food to last through the polar nights.

I too was not exempt from that, so I was anxious that I could not hunt enough today.

While I was cleaning my gun, Sieg suddenly muttered something.

“Are you going to stop chasing reindeers then?”

“Eh?”

Today was the first time I tried chasing a wild reindeer. I expected that the migratory herd would move on by tomorrow. I was expecting tomorrow to be the last day, when Sieg said something.

“Why?”

“It’s dangerous to hunt while moving on the sleigh.”

“No, it’s alright. I used that method to hunt for ten years, all alone. It’s not like I fell over for the first time.”

“.....”

There was only one opportunity a year to hunt for reindeers, when they came around to eat moss hidden under the snow.

I attempted it every year, but I never could hunt a reindeer.

This hunt was grandfather’s pride and joy.

I witnessed him controlling his reindeer deftly and take down wild reindeers with a bullet to the head many times when I was little.

When grandfather passed away, I went out on reindeer hunts with father, but even father could not shoot a reindeer down from a moving sleigh.

Grandfather was an expert marksman, it was not a feat that anyone could do.

However, since I remembered those moments, I attempted those reckless acts out of curiosity.

Besides, wild reindeers are tasty.

Since they move over long distances in search of food, wild reindeers are well-built. The flavour condensed from eating a wide variety of food from the forest defied comparison the flavour from domesticated reindeers.

Normally, it is said that meat tastes bad if the animal was killed while it's thrashing, but even so wild reindeers were desirable.

I passionately preached about the greatness of wild reindeer meat, but Sieg was expressionless as though she was uninterested.

Maybe she was unsatisfied that I could not hunt anything. Her eyes narrowed more.

"Tomorrow's the last."

"Is it worth risking your life?"

"Well, not really."

"....."

It might be better to go steady and hunt birds and rabbits. I have Sieg with me this year. Though I thought that she would be unforgiving to selfish desires, my wife who was crossing her arms and glowering at me said something splendid.

“If you really want.”

“?”

“I’ll give you an advice.”

“Eh!?”

“It’s about handling guns.”

“!”

From my slouching posture, I instantly straightened my back.

“Eh, what is it!? Is there a secret!? Tell me!”

“!?”

Sieg’s serious expression turned into a surprised on.

“What’s wrong?”

“.....No, it was just unexpected.”

“?”

“From my experiences, my impression of men were that men are prideful creatures that disliked getting orders or advice from women.”

“I see. In my case, I would love to hear any advice Sieg has for me.”

“.....”

When I hurried her saying that anything is fine, Sieg first pointed out the way I was handling the gun. She told me the right way to hold the gun and the right way to shoot, teaching me the method she learned in the army, although she added that it might not be good for hunting.

Normally, I would just aim from experience, by observing how the prey moved. However, shooting while moving was still an uncharted land for me.

Since Sieg learned how to shoot on horseback, she knew the right way.

Estimating time until the bullet arrived at the target, reading the wind and calculating the trajectory. She knew many things.

“.....Well, these are the technical theories, but it indeed is hard to sharpshoot when you and the target are both moving.”

“I thought so.”

“When you shoot, you should put the target’s movement into consideration and aim in front of the moving target.”

“Sounds hard.”

Hearing Sieg’s advice, I concluded that it would currently be impossible for me to shoot them in the head.

I usually just aimed for the head since it was bothersome to remove the bullet when I processed the animals.

“Hey, Sieg, will you help me tomorrow?”

“Do you want me to drive the sleigh?”

“No, I can’t ask you to do that.”

Driving a sleigh is dangerous. There was no way I would make Sieg do it.

“I thought up a plan, but you are free to decline.”

I told Sieg about the plan I thought up.

When I looked to her for confirmation, she accepted the request.



The next day.

The second day of the reindeer hunt began under a clear sky.

We soon came across wild reindeers. I slowly approached at first, and once they were within range I sped up.

A short distance away, Sieg was driving a dog sled.

She had a pivotal role in this plan.

My reindeer quickly outran the wild reindeer.

Using the knowledge I learned from Sieg last night, I aimed to where the wild reindeer would move to.

For one shot, I concentrated my strength and pulled the trigger.

The bullet grazed an antler.

Don't rush. My reindeer and I still have stamina.

With a trembling hand, I pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit the thigh of a reindeer.

Struck and unbalanced, the reindeer collapsed on the ground.

I stopped the sleigh and ran towards the fallen reindeer. Sieg followed behind me.

I wrestled with the fallen reindeer and managed to overpower it, exposing its belly.

“Sieg!”

I signalled her, to which she raised a knife high above her head and stabbed it through the chest, aiming for the heart.

At that moment, we quickly evacuated the area around the reindeer.

A while later, the reindeer finally stopped moving.

“——!”

I felt an indescribable feeling of delight.

“Sieg, we did it!”

I was so happy that I grabbed her hands and kissed her cheek in gratitude.

I wanted to hug right there, but since the knife was still in the reindeer we split to take care of it.

Like so, our reindeer hunt ended.

## Chapter 14 - The Hunting Life Continues Even Today.

It has been a month since Sieg has arrived.

The temporary life was not by any means sweet, but the time with her was joyous enough just from the fact that I had someone to talk to.

In that life, I knew that Sieg was trying her best in a new environment.

She was learning the language of this country, was socialising with the villagers, and was learning hunting techniques. She barely had any free time.

I felt sorry for making her struggle so much, but her appearance as she tried was beautiful, that I just watched her from the sidelines.

Already welded into daily life, we were hunting everyday, taking plenty of time, as preparation for polar nights.

Though she was a novice hunter, as expected of a woman from the military, her sharpshooting skills were superb. The time she took to calculate the time it took the bullet to impact and the time she took to reload the gun were both fast.

Like always, we went out hunting today.

Searching for prey in the snowy forest and leading the prey into the guns' range is the job of the hunting dogs.

To hunting dogs, we give them ears of freshly hunted animals to make them remember the smell. We raised the dogs like for generations.

We followed the tracks of those dogs into the forest.

On our way, we came across a thin, brown-haired animal, which had white fur on its face.

“Ritz, what’s that?”

“Black marten.”

Black marten pelts were loved as luxury goods by noble madams, but because their numbers dwindled from excessive hunting, the country banned the hunting of these animals.

Even in this village of hunters, since it was ruled by nobles, the law applied here too. However, martens were never really hunted that much for meat nor for fur. The reason being that the creature had a bad stench. There is a method to remove the smell, but to create one hat it took many martens so it was bothersome to process too.

Having seen us, it jumped a little and escaped to safety.

To such a lovely creature, I waved it goodbye as we proceeded.

“Ah, we can’t go here.”

“?”

As we walked through the forest, I found something.

In front of us, there was a tree slashed open, lightly chewed up inside.

I blew the dog whistle and turned around.

“What’s that?”

“A bear claw mark. This is a bear’s sphere of action.”

“!”

I told Sieg to remember the mark. After I confirmed that the dogs had returned, I quickly left that place.

Bears are the most dangerous creatures in the forest.

Many people in the village lost their lives to bears. The catastrophe three centuries ago was caused by a bear.

A bear who remembered how humans tasted attacked the village, creating tens of victims.

Was it five years ago? The first time I met a bear when I went hunting with Teoporon.

Teoporon used his wild senses(?) to find prey. Back then, I thought it was interesting so I followed him on hunts many times.

Walking a short distance behind Teoporon, we would always find animals.

Rabbits, deers, boars and foxes. Teoporon did not use a gun, but just a spear.

Still, back then, I thought I would learn a lot just from watching.

However, we finally came across the worst possible opponent, a white bear.

The bear charged towards us. I quickly lifted up my gun, but because of Teoporon's sudden shout, I lost my timing to shoot.

As expected, the bear changed course towards Teoporon who shouted.

The bear knocked Teoporon over in a blink.

The bear was even bigger than that big man. I had thought that all hope was lost.

While I was considering whether I should shoot the bear or not, the big white beast was attacked by him. In its chest, a spear was impaled deeply through it.

I realised that he fell over on purpose only after the bear died.

However I imagined it, it was an impossible hunting method for me. At the same time, I decided that I should stop following someone on hunts when I couldn't even understand him.

"Bears truly are dangerous."

I taught Sieg about its sphere of action and its behaviour.

I explained about the scratched trees, the excrements that had whole heads, characteristic of carnivores, and the footprints. I also told her that the holes with branches, that were shaped like a big bird's nest, were holes that bears made after they spat up berries.

"Though it was tasty. The bear."

".....It doesn't really look nice."

"If it's on sale, I would gladly buy it up. Though no one would dare try hunting it to sell the meat."

Really, bear meat tastes great.

Most of its body consists of fat, but once the smell is removed and the meat is cooked, every part of the meat is top-quality. The organs are sold at a high price to pharmacists to be made into medicine, and its paws are treated as delicacies.

As I went back, I carved a cross mark on a tree.

This was to tell others that bears are in the area in front.

Although the villagers don't communicate much outside of their family members, in the hunting grounds we have a custom to share as much information.

Crosses for bears, triangles for lynxes, stars for wolves, and squares for wolverines. We have set marks for different species.

We returned home as we chatted about those things.

After we returned, we butchered some animals for a few hours, and then we bathed. Since there was only one bath, I always told Sieg to go in first. In our house, the ladies always went first.

After dinner, we usually spent the time playing.

Today, we had a board game, consisting of a checkered board and little pieces that were carved in the shapes of a queen, a king, bishops, knights, and castles. Strategy was important in this game, and it took a lot of concentration. I soon got hooked up on the game<sup>9</sup>.

As always, my territory was trampled over, and my king faced an ultimatum.

“A~a”

“One more round?”

“No, tomorrow. I want to analyse why I lost.”

After I remembered the positions of the pieces, I stored the game back into its box.

Then, I opened the exchange diary that was on the edge of the table. As always, ‘Nothing out of the ordinary’ was written.

I told her that it’s not a military report, but she replied that she had nothing special to write about since she asked verbally about anything she was wondering about.

Although she was in front of me, I started writing in it.

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9 Chess I suppose

‘What’s your favourite colour?’ I wrote.

Now that it came to this, I need to lead her to write something in.

So I wrote in a question in the diary.

“I never really thought about what colour I like.”

“It’s meaningless if you answer now! And please think about it a little!”

“What will you do with such information?”

“I want to know more about Sieg and get closer.”

“.....”

Because there was no response, I unconsciously looked at her face, but sadly, she was expressionless.

She was my wife, yet she was full of mysteries. She was taciturn, and her feelings did not show on her face.

Even though I calmly observed her, I still did not know what she liked and disliked. That was my tentative wife, Sieglinde.

“Really, from the bottom of my heart, I am happy to spend every day with Sieg. I really want you to stay here, and if possible extend the contract to two years.”

Although, at the second time, instead of a tentative contract, I want to make a full contract.

“But still, it’s this kind of environment, so I won’t stop you from leaving.”

Since I should not pressure her, I said that in show. Though when I thought about the other person that came before, I had a strange hurting feeling in my chest, but I tried to hide it from showing on my face.

Sieg grabbed a pen and the exchange diary, and started writing something down. Then it was shown to me.

This was what was written:

——I will try finding out what colour I like this time. Also, the life here is very exciting and immensely pleasant.

After reading it, my frozen face loosened up.

“You mean, it’s not too bad here?”

“Was it not meaningless to answer now?”

“!”

Saying that, Sieg smiled playfully.

From the sudden ambush, I ended up clutching my heart.

Like so, our temporary life continued.

## Chapter 15 – Coexistence

Because the polar nights were approaching, sunlight duration was getting shorter too. During those times, I spent time by selling processed meat and fur to merchants or by making more preserved food.

I usually make preserved foods in bottles.

I processed the food at the worktable outside at the back of the house. This is a place to spiritedly process wild animals, and it can be used freely because it's not a Ruruporon's sanctuary.

Today's course is a bottle of ptarmigan liver spread. It's a seasonal dish.

I carefully cleaned the blood and fat off many livers, and then marinated them in milk to get rid of the smell.

The morning after that, I boiled the livers down with vegetables and soy sauce, and added spices, alcohol and powdered bird bones to season it. I then boiled the paste until all the moisture evaporated away, and then added butter. Finally, I put it in a clean leather sack and battered it with all my might.

Good with bread or biscuits, the ptarmigan liver spread was completed.

I then put it in a bottle, and deaerated and sterilised the bottle to enable storage for long periods.

Under the cold, after finishing up the making of the liver spread, Sieg came back from helping Miruporon in the forest to see what I was doing.

"What were you doing?"

"Preserving ptarmigans. Are you fine with livers?"

I heard that many women did not like it, but Sieg said that she enjoyed it. So I scooped up a bit of the liver spread I just made onto the back of my wife's hand.

Sieg then brought it to her mouth and tasted it.

Then she said one word.

“Delicious.”

“Really?”

“Mm-hm. You cook well.”

Thanks to the unexpected praise, my cheeks loosened. Since only I ate it, it was exciting hear someone else’s opinion.

Next up is curing duck meat in fat.

First, the meat is thoroughly seasoned with salt and sugar. Then, after setting some spices, it is left to sit for a day<sup>10</sup>.

Then it is boiled in oil at a low temperature and put in a bottle. Afterwards, the fat from ducks is used to fill up the bottle.

It uses a lot of fat, but the meat has an unexpected clean taste. It also goes well with sour or salty berry sauces, that it is a delicacy in the daily life during polar nights.

The food are stored in the underground cellar. Seeing the bottles lined up, I thought to myself how good they looked for self-satisfaction. Since I put more effort in compared to last year, I relaxed at the thought that the polar nights this year will also pass without any problems.

But this was not all we had to prepare for the polar nights.

During our rest in the evening, I told Sieg of tomorrow’s schedule.

“I’d like to you to help Miruporon again tomorrow.”

“Understood.”

“As for me, tomorrow.....”

---

<sup>10</sup> Cloves?

Because I did not really want to do it, I ended up sighing shortly before I continued.

“What’s wrong?”

“No, tomorrow, I’ll be going around the village to check if everyone is prepared for the polar nights.”

Even if I don’t check on the villagers, most households are perfectly prepared. However, there are rare cases where the men of the house get injured or come down with a sickness before the preparations. Since our people do not like to rely on others, even if that happens not many know of it.

I hear of the news of the village from travelling merchants, but even they do not know everything that goes on in the village, so for this I have to go.

If there is a troubled household, we are to aid them financially as well as share food. We also go around to other houses to plead them to share some food. This was decided by my grandfather when he was the lord.

It’s not hard to bow down, but the work’s still hard.

It’s a depressing event that happens every year.

When I explained it to Sieg, she made an unexpected proposal.

“Can I tag along for that?”

“Eh!? .....No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why not?”

“The villagers are unfriendly even towards me who is from this village, so if a foreigner visits they might get unnecessarily adverse.”

“.....”

As to why I am disliked, I think it's because I have foreign blood mixed in.

Also, there are a few more things.

My father was an adventurer travelling around the world.

He met different peoples around the world, and had a mysterious courage, with the spirit of an adventurer.

He grew up in foreign lands and had poor marksmanship that never improved. In the end, he went on a trip around the world with mother. He was a troublesome man, always having a boyish heart.

Well, though it was thanks to his background that I could get connections to foreign high society.

“Hmm.”

Although I put on a troubled expression, she still was tilting her head in question.

I tried telling her how terrible the elderly people were, but Sieg still wanted to follow me on the patrol.

I also want to boast Sieglinde. However, what awaits are not blessings but curses from old, xenophobic villagers.

“I want to remember at least one more face from the village.”

“Even if you say that.”

“Please.”

“.....”

If she asks with such an earnest expression, I can't possibly refuse.

“Alright. But you have stay behind me.”

“Thank you.”

“.....”

What's with this superior and subordinate like conversation.

I want more sweet talk!

After we discussed about tomorrow's schedule, we started talking about boars.

.....This isn't it. This isn't what I want. I want something more couple-like.

“What should I do if a boar charges at me?”

“For that, you should jump to the side moments just a little before it might hit you. Boars can't instantly turn.”

“I see.”

“.....”

I was pondering how I should turn this into a sweet mood, but because Sieg started talking about butchering I gave up on it.

“Recently, male boar meat seems to smell a bit stronger, is there a reason for that?”

“Ah, they might be in heat.”

“Is that so?”

“We should stop hunting boars for now.”

“Alright.”

“.....”

I questioned myself many times as to how it came to this.



The next day.

To patrol the village, I left early. Sieg followed closely behind.

Should I go to a house that dislikes me first? Or instead getting demoralised from the beginning, should I go to a relatively friendly house?

I mulled over what to do, but I ended up going to the first house I saw.

The first time.

“Ah, right~. Preparations for the polar nights”

They closed the door immediately. This means that they have no problems and that I should go.

I turned around and shrugged, to which Sieg silently patted my back.

The second time.

“Aahh, we don’t have even a tiny bit of problem, so go already!”

“Ah, yes.”

“.....”

Again, they shut the door coldly. The same happened the third time and the fourth time.

There are about seventy houses in all. Since it's too much to do in one day, I ended it for the day.

“Sieg, sorry.”

“.....No”

There were some people who hurled abuses at Sieg. This was the reason why I did not want to bring her along, but she still said that she'll follow me tomorrow.

“Please, won't you stay home tomorrow?”

“.....”

Though I pleaded her not to, she did not respond.

I was eing serious, but Sieg just crossed her arms, and not a single muscle on her faced twitched.

I thought of acting cute to convince her, but just by imagining myself doing that I got disgusted so I didn't do that. I'm almost thirty now, about to become an oji-san. I have to be more mindful of how I act or speak.

“Okay, Sieg. I can't win against you.”

“!”

That night, we did not play together as usual and parted early.

It wasn't as though I was angry at Sieg, but I was exhausted from hearing insults all day.

When I dived into my bed, my consciousness soon drifted into sleep.

The next morning.

Because I woke up early, I went to the living room, but Sieg who always woke up earlier was not there.

As I was thinking that it was rare occurrence, I saw the exchange diary lying on the table.

Yet again, I expected it to have 'nothing out of the ordinary' again, but when I opened to the latest page it was filled with sentences.

Sieg was surprised by the attitude of the villagers we visited yesterday, but she was not uncomfortable.

However, she wrote that it felt something indescribable when she saw me, the lord, being chastised and getting depressed.

Still, she was relieved to see that I came back to life when she talked to me. So she wrote in polite words that she would like to accompany me again the day after.

—— I am still inexperienced to help out with the village, but I at least want to support you from behind the scenes.

From that, I was moved to tears.

While I was reading the diary over and over again, Sieg woke up.

Her eyes looked tired. She might have been up late to write this. From that thought, my heart calmed down and warmed up.

“Sieg, thank you.”

When I showed her my gratitude while holding up the diary, my curt wife just returned a short reply.

That morning, I wanted to hug her.

## Chapter 16 - Forewarned is Forearmed<sup>11</sup>.

Now that I'm done with securing food and hearing out my people, I have to start preparing light, water, and materials for traditional crafting.

In this village, we use candles.

We use animal fat to make them, with herbs to remove the smell.

"I never imagined that we would be making our own candles."

"Well, we have to be self-sufficient. The goods merchants bring have shipping costs included so they're wasteful too."

Today, we are making candles together.

Since Sieg had been going out to the forest with Miruporon these days, it's been a while since we worked together.

"....."

"Hm?"

Sieg looked at me strangely.

"No, you look rather happy, so I was wondering if you liked making candles."

Looks like I wore my heart on my sleeve. I could tell her that I am happy to work with her, but it would be bad if she got put off from that so I just smiled it off.

For making candles, we use sow intestinal fat. Hog fat smell is too strong to be erased with herbs.

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<sup>11</sup> The original Japanese title says 'Well prepared means no worries.

The fat, which was set aside during the butchering process, is cut into equal sizes and thrown into a pot of boiling water. Then powdered herbs are added to remove the smell.

As we boil this, white foams of fat form. Once that's processed many times and the water is cleaned off, we can get boar oil.

From this boar oil, once we add some herbs, we could make ointment or soap from it. Ancient people's wisdom is great, I said as I continued working with Sieg.

Now that the fat has turned semisolid, wicks, made from twisting a few strings, are hung on a long wooden stick. It is then dipped in the fat and then taken out to dry for a while. Once we repeat that a few more times, a candle is made. It takes a lot of time and effort to make just one, but since it's the only source of life other than the fireplace during the polar nights, I can't afford to cut any corners.

For the water, we draw it from the forest behind the village.

For some strange reason, the spring does not freeze even in winter. They say that it's the Spirit's power working. Since the river in the forest was frozen, even Sieg was surprised.

In preparation for the polar nights, we filled the containers up and carried them back home. Of course, since they can't be kept for that long, we have to go out in the dark sometimes. However, around that area, no beasts appear so it's safe. I would just need a lamp.

As additional sources, for purposes other than drinking, we use groundwater or melted snow. There is plenty of water, so there are no problems with that.

Finally, we are going out to get materials for crafting. We are getting them to prepare for crafting during the long polar nights.

A symbolic good of our village's tradition is a wooden cup called kuksa.

It's made from birch burls, which are formed by trees to cover up after an animal damages the bark.

These lumps are slowly dried for two months before we get to crafting.

Although I already have some prepared, I have to go out for some now since we can't go into the forests during the polar nights.

Other than the wooden cups, we have bags and bracelets made out of reindeer leather, baskets made out of softened tree roots, scabbards made out of reindeer horns, among many other goods.

Since they're all handmade, they're usually very expensive, but after the polar nights they're sold at a relatively affordable price at cities. Since all the villagers have many of the same goods, the value falls.

After the polar night is over, at the nearby port, an icebreaker comes cutting through the frozen sea.

During that season, the port becomes full of people, and a flea market opens everyday.

The polar nights were a fitting period to make traditional crafts.



“——And, well, this is it!”

The storeroom is full of preserved goods and containers filled with water. There are also meat that are finished with fermenting under the snow, and also yet unprocessed fur.

I reported to Sieg that we are fully prepared.

Indeed, the motivation is different when there's family involved. I could really feel it every day.



One afternoon, Sieg brought out a wooden box she brought from her house.

“What’s this?”

“I thought we might be able to sell these to supplement living expenses.”

When she unravelled the cloth and opened the box, there were embroidered handkerchiefs. There were also quite a lot.

“Sieg, what’s this?”

“These are things I made back home to kill some time.”

“Wait, you mean you made all these!?”

I had a preconception that she was not good with womanly work, so I was surprised at her unexpectedly good craftsmanship.

“Ah~, but this is too much.”

“?”

“The merchants around here probably won’t buy these unless they’re cheap. People around here don’t use these beautiful silk handkerchiefs.”

I thought that they would sell at a high price in cities.

However, it took a few days to go there even by reindeer. It cost money to get to cities, so it was not economical.

“It might be a good idea to put it up on the gift shop from spring to early autumn. The visitors are either nobles or the rich.”

“Is that so. Well, I’ll leave that to you.”

“Thank you.”

“No, well, it didn’t really help that much though.”

“But I am really happy.”

“.....”

When I said that, Sieg made a troubled expression. Recently, she had these kinds of expression on often, so I made sure to not say anything unnecessary.

Then, the polar nights came. With a blizzard.

“That’s an amazing amount of snow.”

“This doesn’t look like it’ll let up anytime soon.”

The windows rattled, and the wind hit the house with a ferocious noise.

It was harsh outside, but inside, it was warm and peaceful.

Since the martial race family are resting today, we are doing everything by ourselves.

I hung a pot over the fire.

I brought some suitable ingredients from the pantry and started cooking.

Today’s soup is something from Sieg’s homeland. I’m sort of doing this off the top of my head.

Although she said that she can’t cook, she peeled the vegetables with commendable skill. She was a trusty assistant indeed.

The ingredients: large amounts of potatoes, root vegetables, and smoke boar meat. The soup is made by adding spices and boiling the soup until the ingredients turned mushy. While boiling, the ingredients are mashed using the spatula.

In Sieg's country, potatoes make up most of their meals.

In her country, it is said that women can't marry unless they know how to two hundred different potato dishes. Of course, it's not guaranteed that women who cook well marry well. But it's an allegory to show that women need to be able to cook that much to marry.

I skewered a reindeer sausage, spiced it and grilled it by the fireplace. Once the fat starts rising on the surface and the juice starts dripping, it's done.

Consisting of black barley bread Ruruporon baked yesterday, some cheese, sausages and soup, the breakfast is complete.

I was complimented that the soup was cook. Since I wanted to cook more dishes from Sieg's country, I asked her about them.

"Oh yeah, I liked mashed potato dumplings. They're chewy, and go well with meat."

"Wow, sounds delicious!"

"There's also a dish of sausages and potatoes fried with spices, sausages made from meat minced with rhubarbs, bread with berries in them....."

However, the recipe was still a mystery so they will have to be cooked according to Sieg's tastes.

After we finished eating, as always, it's time to let our stomachs recover.

"By the way, how are the Rangos doing with their own preparations?"

"They'll be fine. Teoporon still goes out hunting even in the dark, and both Ruruporon and Miruporon understand the polar nights and have prepared for it."

“Is that so. Then that’s good.”

Recently, I checked up on their storage, but there were more food there than here.

As I married, I gifted them with a house a short distance from the village.

Teoporon processes the hunted animals at the hut by the mansion, but for other tasks he was doing it back home.

They too were preparing for the polar nights.

After this, we will be making traditional crafts at the workshop.

Since I learned that Sieg’s craftsmanship was good, I asked her to make some with me as I taught her how.

In this season, there’s no use feeling agitated, so it’s good to be relaxed. While talking about things like that, we calmly passed the time.

## Chapter 17 - Polar Night (Kaamos)

In the snowstorm, Sieg and I fed the dogs. The reindeers are in the fenced area of the forest. If the wind recedes, we will be able to take them out on walks, but because of the weather today we sent them back home and told them to stay there.

I want to say that I then relaxed with Sieg, but a poor noble cannot afford such elegance.

There was a mountain of work back home.

When I said that, Sieg said that she will help as much as she can.

She really is a dependable wife. I was moved to tears.

First, we started off by processing the furs that we had been neglecting.

Fur can't be washed in water. So, it is cleaned by using a special powdered soap with herbs.

"First, we sprinkle this special powder over the fur."

Today, I am working with a student. Wearing an apron, Sieg was an earnest student who wrote down the method on her note.

I sprinkled the powder all over the fur and rubbed it with painstaking care.

"Once the colour of the powder turns, we shake it off.

"Although it's hard to see just from looking, fur easily becomes dirty," I muttered as I continued working.

I continued to rub the fur. I made sure to scrub off any stains.

“If the powder’s colour stops turning, we remove it.”

With swift movements, I brushed along the grain.

For the finish, a cloth soaked in soap water is used to scrub the fur.

Now that I was done with explanations, it was now Sieg’s turn. I supervised her to see if there weren’t any mistakes.

“Yeah, you’re doing well.”

Having good senses, she cleaned the fur with a nimbleness unexpected from a novice.

When I wondered about that, she told me that it was similar to taking care of leather equipments when she was in the army. Then it makes sense.

Coats, shoes, hats and gloves. With both of us working, it only took a while to finish.

“It’s fortunate that Sieg is here with me. I was alone every year.”

There are double the amount of goods because of Sieg, but it was fun to work while chatting. Since I was the type to work slower when alone, it was really nice that I had Sieg.

Next, we cleaned the house.

Though she was an esteemed daughter of a powerful noble family, she was still a woman from the army. She did the cleaning perfectly.

“We did our own cleaning ourselves.”

“I see.”

“Aa. Since no one liked cleaning, we took out games in our break times and made the losers do the cleaning.....”

When she just enlisted in the army, only thirteen, Sieg lost a lot so much that she became good at cleaning. However, being the type to hate losing, she bought books and studied strategies to win.

“Now I see why can’t win.”

“But you have potential.”

“Eh, really? I wonder if I’ll start winning soon~”

“I wonder about that?”

“Then, won’t you just lose once for me?”

As we chatted playfully, it soon became time for lunch.

For lunch, I heated the rest of the soup and roasted reindeer meat on a skewer with some herbs on the fireplace.

Today’s reindeer was one that was recently caught by Sieg.

Unable to hold back anymore, I took a bite. The texture was amazing, and the delicious juices flowed in my mouth. The herbs did not interfere with the meat and mixed in with the juices.

Even Sieg made a surprised expression from how different the taste was from the usual reindeers.

“This is amazing.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Really delicious.”

“I’m glad. I wanted you to taste it. Rather, it’s thanks to you that we can have this.”

To that, Sieg made neither a modest look nor an approving look, but just wore a warm smile.

To such a precious expression, I unconsciously fell for her.

However, that smile quickly disappeared and was replaced by a stern look.

“It’s dangerous to reindeers alone.”

“.....Yes.”

I was also deredere because I got to see Sieg’s rare smile, but she soon turned back to being a soldier. I felt strongly that not everything in the world is so sweet.

“However.”

“?”

The talk was not yet over. Holding a spoonful of soup in the air, I stopped and stared at my wife.

“I might be able to help next year. Then, let’s hunt together.”

“.....Eh!? O, ow, hot!”

From her words, I ended up spilling the soup over the back of my hand which was resting on the table.

While I was still in confusion from her words, Sieg wiped the soup off with a napkin. Then she opened the windows to get some snow, putting them in a cloth and placing it over the back of my hand.

“.....What are you doing.”

“S-So~rry.”

I can't tell her that it was because she said something about next year. If I looked expectant here, I thought that I might end up burdening her.

For now, she will stay by my side for a year. That's still good enough, I told myself.



After lunch, we started working in the workshop.

Again, I was with my diligent student Sieglinde.

"Today, we are making kuksas"

A traditional craft of the Sami people.

It's small drinking cup, made through a vexatious process.

The ingredient is a dried birch burl that was harvested two months ago.

It's to be made with one that is sturdy and is fine-grained. However, in this area, there are only birches here, so I think it just might have been that we had no choice but to use them.

"First, we carve off the barks, turning it into a wooden lump."

The barks are carved off with a specially designed chisel.

Since the wood is hard, I thought it might be hard for women, but even here Sieg was strong and had dexterity.

The round birch lump is carved into a square shape, and a round hole is carved in the middle.

Taking time, Sieg made one, and I made three.

“Sieg, your hands, are they alright?”

Birch wood is really tough. Recalling how I got blisters at first, I asked out of worry.

“It’s fine. The skin on my hands are already tough.”

“I see. I’m glad to hear that.”

“Rather,”

“?”

“Ritz’s hand is much worse.”

“.....Aa, since we don’t really apply medicine afterwards.”

“.....”

I muttered as I stared at my scarred hand. Hardships are unending here in this snow country.

In this village, people just rinse the wound with fresh water and rub it carefully to cure the wounds.

Some time ago, at a foreign ball, there was one time when I fell over because I was drunk. There, they applied medicine on the wound and wrapped it in bandage, so I was very surprised.

By using medicine, the pain quickly goes away and it leaves barely any scars. Thus, I made the village shop import medicine, but since the villagers still believed in the old methods there are always some medicine in the stock.

Of course, if we receive a severe injury or a serious disease, we do call doctors.

It’s because my grandfather advocated that the Spirit’s teachings were mostly wrong.

When I told her about things like that, Sieg also understood.

As I sighed while sipping warm mulled wine, more work awaited me.

The fourth carving. It's not up to the point it can be scraped out cleanly.

"Once it's done up to this, we bury it in the snow."

There was still a snowstorm, but I went out anyway. I buried ones I just made, dug up the birch wood that I buried yesterday.

"This isn't finished yet."

After letting it sit in the snow for a day, the wood is then boiled in salt water, with it's concentration being the same as sea water. If that's done, the wood gets barely any cracks.

"After boiling it, we have to dry it to make it clean. Well, this takes time as well."

It takes even more time to fashion the cup.

After it's boiled, it needs about seven days to dry.

I carved a little bit off the dried wood from a week ago. Thinking that it was enough for one day, I cleaned up and left the workshop.

It was the start of the long polar nights.

## Chapter 18 - Season of Change

Yet again, the sun did not rise today.

At the first day of the polar nights, the snow stopped falling. But soon afterwards, there was a stormy weather.

After a few days of that, the wind finally stopped and the sky became clear.

Today, we have to feed and clean the reindeers in the forest. Even if I am the lord, I have to take care of precious property.

After breakfast, I fed the dogs and took them out. The destination is of course the reindeers' forest. Because they were going out after a long time, the dogs rushed out without holding back.

When I was about to tell Sieg, who was cleaning up the tableware, that I was going out, I soon heard a reply from outside the door.

"Hey, Sieg, watch your step..... hm?"

For some reason, Sieg was staring vacantly ahead.

"Sieglinde?"

"This is....."

"?"

"Beautiful."

"!"

What Sieg was bewildered at was the world of faint light that could be seen only during the polar nights. In the whole day, only during this time we can see clearly. Furthermore, it can only be seen for a short while.

It was not the darkness but a clear blue silence that spread out before our eyes. This was the short moment between morning and evening, a fantastical world. I recall my father saying that.

For me, it was a sight I had been seeing all my life, so it was nothing special like auroras.

I wanted to let Sieg calmly watch the scenery, but the dogs did not let us wait. They were just running around me, urging me on, but ultimately they ended up running up to Sieg as well.

“Ah, sorry. Shall we go?”

“Sorry about that. The dogs disturbed you.”

“No, we don’t have much time. Let’s hurry.”

Taking a lantern, feed, cleaning tools, as well as a gun and a knife just in case, we started walking.



The reindeer feed is a solid feed bought from a merchant. It’s round, and I mix berries, barks and moss in them as well.

Because of that, we have those foods stored in the village storehouse. We took all those to the fenced area.

Since the feed is packed tightly, it’s quite hard. The too was rather big, just a little bigger than a seven-year-old child, so we had to roll it to the forest.

I ordered the dogs to stay outside the fence and play, and Sieg and I rolled the feed in and entered.

There are four feed boxes. We have make two round-trips. But that’s not all the work.

Though it was being stored inside, as it was stored in a room without heating, the lump of herbage was frozen solid. We had to crack that apart with an axe.

“We can’t just pound it. We have make sure that the blade cuts in through the cracks.”

I passed some feed over to Sieg.

While beads of sweat formed on our brows, we finished putting the feed in the feed boxes. Then we cleaned up their excrements and went back home, calling the dogs by whistling.

On returning home, I took off my clothes and wiped my body with a cloth soaked in medicinal water. If I do this carelessly here, I’ll end up catching a cold.

When I went to the living, there was Sieg boiling some water.

“That, is that coffee?”

“I just remembered that I brought some from my house.”

“Ooh!”

In this country too, coffee is a loved drink. Us northern people might even have the highest coffee consumption rate. However, here we like to drink things that warm up our body. So we drink spiced strawberry juice or mulled wine, or tea from herbs in the forest. They’re all drinks made from ingredients harvested from mother nature from spring, the beginning of thawing, to autumn.

Our people, being a fundamentally self-sufficient people, try to not spend anything wastefully.

So even though it’s a drink that people of our country love we do not have many opportunities to try it.

Sieg started preparing the coffee.

She put some coffee beans in the grinder in grounded them finely. On a deep spoon with very fine holes, she laid on a wet cloth and put the ground coffee over it.

Then she placed the spoon on a bottle, fixing it in place so that it will not spill. She then slowly poured hot water over it.

That cotton fabric seemed to be something specially made for making coffee.

Since it was the first time I saw such a method, I ended up observing it a lot.

The coffee slowly dripped into the bottle, making a plop plop sound<sup>12</sup>.

I stared at Sieg who was paying attention to the bottle. Her eyelashes pointing upwards through her hair was lovely. In this sunless season, her red hair shined like the sun.

I stared at my wife who was making coffee earnestly.

“Sugar?”

“.....”

“Ritzhard”

“!”

I flinched at having my name called. I was staring at Sieg’s hands, so I was distracted. When I asked her what it was, she asked about what she should do about sugar.

“What should I do”

“?”

“No, I did drink coffee before.”

As he disliked the sweet spiced drinks, my father frequently enjoyed coffee, but he stopped drinking them when my grandfather said that it’s wasteful. The last time I had coffee was a long

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12 The Japanese word here for the onomatopoeia is potari potari.

time ago when I was little. I can somewhat recall putting in lots of reindeer milk and sugar in them. In retrospect, it really was an extravagant drink as grandfather said.

The sugar Sieg brought from her house were cubical. They were in a ceramic container, and I was surprised from the fact that it even had its own utensil for grabbing sugar.

“Sieg, how much do you put in?”

“About three cubes.”

“Then I’ll also have three.”

Sieg stirred the sugar in. When I got my cup of coffee, I was surprised by the aromatic smell.

She said that by using the cloth, it gets filtered well that one can enjoy a purer taste and smell.

I calmly enjoyed the scent and then took a sip.

“Wow, delicious!”

It went down smoothly, and the taste was rich. I could say that it was the best coffee I ever had.

Sieg too must have been satisfied.

From one sip, her frown slightly loosened.

I continued observing her without ever tiring.

Seeing that she put in three cubes of sugar, I can assume that she likes sweet things. Here, there are no sweet confectionaries though. There are not enough leftover sugar, flour, eggs and butter to bake confectionaries.

I was forcing an inconvenient lifestyle on her. That thought crossed my head.

To relieve myself of that worry, I asked a question to Sieg.

“Hey, is there anything that you wish for?”

“Why so suddenly?”

“No, well, in this village, there is no custom to hold a large celebration for a marriage, and there is no custom to gift rings like in other countries. I was wondering if there was anything you wanted in lieu.”

“.....”

I knew already that even if I asked, she would reply “Nothing really”.

Sieg said that she wanted us to be a temporary couple for a year.

In other words, it meant not expecting not anything from each other.

“Sorry, talking about something like this suddenly.....”

“Please teach me the language of this country.”

“Pardon?”

“If possible, I’d like to be able to converse about daily life in this country’s language.”

“.....”

From an unexpectedly modest wish, I was at a loss for words.

Seeing me like that, Sieg examined me worriedly.

“You don’t want to?”

“N-no, it’s not, that I don’t want to.”

“Then please teach.”

“Yes, I’ll be glad to.”

After that, she silently spent the time sipping coffee.

The silent space was somehow pleasant.



The busy days continued.

Fermenting, butchering, processing fur and crafting.

In between times I worked, I also taught Sieg the language of this country.

As I taught a smart student, it wasn’t all that hard.

It’s already been a month since the days when the sun did not rise start.

I was worried because it was the first time, but Sieg remained unchanged.

The darkness makes people depressed.

I too also had that in the past.

Not wanting to wake up in the morning, spending too much time on just one cup, and not wanting to eat.

My father, who is a scholar, said that people start behaving strange if they do not receive enough sunlight.

However, this year, I did not feel at all depressed. It was all thanks to Sieg.

During that time, a letter, delivered once a week, arrived.

It was for Sieg.

Upon seeing the envelope, Sieg's grey eyes went wide in surprise. I wanted to ask what happened, but I did not want to stick my nose in so I kept still.

A short silent moment later, Sieg talked to me.

"Ritz."

"Hm?"

"My old comrade-in-arms wants to come out here for a trip....."

"Eh, really!?"

It seemed that it was a letter telling her about the schedule. Since it did not herald anything bad, I sighed in relief but ended up murmuring, "Really, Sieg's country's people really do like auroras."

"It says that the trip will be a month later. It also says that the route is the same as the one I took."

"Then I'll have to go out."

From the ice-free port Sieg disembarked at, there is no transport to my village. So I have to go out with a reindeer sleigh.

".....Sorry"

"No, tourists are always welcome."

"But aren't the inns closed at this time of the year?"

"It's alright. Staying at our house is fine, right? We do have some empty rooms to share."

".....Sorry, I'm at a loss for words."

"Don't worry. I also want to meet Sieg's friend."

“No, I don’t have that kind of relationship with him.....”

“Hm?”

.....Huh? Her comrade is a man.

And what do you mean ‘that kind of relationship’!? Hey, Sieg!!

But I couldn’t possibly say that, so I just said, “How interesting,” and left.

You know what, I’m gutless.

## Chapter 19 - A Special Gift and Preparations for the Guest

As we continued working, Sieg's wooden cup (kuksa) started taking shape.

"It's a bit warped."

"No, it's good for a beginner."

The neat semi-circular cup is completed by glazing it in wax.

The first completed product tilted slightly when placed on the table.

I told her that it can still be used if it's filled with drinks, but Sieg only made a bitter expression.

"Since this is made by you, let's gift this to your parents. I'll make another one."

"Is that okay? Isn't this an important source of income?"

"Sieg, this is said to bring happiness. So I want your parents to have it."

"....."

"Let's send it with a letter."

I patted Sieg, who was still looking worried, and went to my room to get a letter paper and a pen.

When I came back to the living room, Sieg was comparing the usual kuksa that we use and the kuksa she just made.

"Bringing happiness, huh."

"Yup. Ah, the one you're using is also carved after our marriage was decided."

"!!"

"It was made from a neatly grained birch burl kept for....."

“Was, that so. I didn’t know.”

“It’s well made, right?”

“Yeah, thank you..... Erm, I don’t know what I should say.”

“Why?”

“I also know the difficulty of making a kuksa.”

Ah, maybe I shouldn’t have told her about that.

I instantly regretted it. I cursed my own loose tongue.

In the end, I did not know what to say, so my face continued to stay pale.

It might have been a poor attempt to cover up for my miserable expression, but I said to her the thing that I had always been thinking.

“I want to do anything possible for your happiness, and this little work is nothing.”

“.....”

Sieg made a rare expression, the troubled expression.

I didn’t mean to make her like that, I thought.

I don’t like depressing moods. So to change the atmosphere, I suggested something.

“Let’s write a letter to your parents, Sieg.”

“Ah, right.”

We wrapped our kuksas in soft cloth and decided to put letters in them.



Gradually, the time where there is faint light grew longer. The polar nights were almost over.

Also, the time for Sieg's colleague to visit came closer.

"Sieg, Teoporon and I will go and meet him."

"Is that alright?"

"Yeah. Dogs and reindeer can't run at the same speed."

To go and meet him, I borrowed a reindeer from a neighbour I'm close to. If there are three grown men, there needs to be more reindeer.

Sieg can drive dog sleds, but does not yet know how to handle reindeer sleighs. Dogs and reindeer run at different speeds, and have different stamina. Thus, it was not practical for Sieg and I to go together.

"Alright. Then, I'll write a message telling him to find a cute white bear."

"Uwa, won't he faint from that?"

"If he faints from just seeing the head of the Rango family, he'll be having a hard time here."

"Really?"

"That's how it is."

While saying that, Sieg smiled mischievously.

I laughed at how her former colleague was being treated so poorly, but at the same time I was envious of how close they seemed.

Once the polar nights are over, the hunting life will start again.

Soon, guests will be visiting, so I was putting more effort into hunting. We're having a guest in a long time. Moreover, the guest time is an acquaintance of Sieg.

The target today is an elk, quite possibly the largest kind of hoofed animals around this area. It does not smell, so it's a popular game for foreigners that visit this area.

Because of the season, there is little food so they are a little thinner than usual. Still, to prepare something that tasty for him, Sieg and I struggled.

It is said that the meat is tastier when the prey is caught before it's blood gets hot. Thus, I set many traps around the forest, but there were no catches there. While petting a dog, I told Sieg that now that we have to hunt now that it came to this.

I signalled the dogs and the two of us hid in the shade.

It's cold trying to not move from the spot in any case.

Sieg too knew that she can't move because she had to stay silent, so she said that she couldn't even rub her back.

Unable to endure the cold, I took a sip from the flask of alcohol I had on my breast pocket. The strong drink damaged my gums and my tongue, and gave a burning heat to my throat.

This alcohol that I bought from a merchant for its effect of warming someone up was a failure. Rather than warmth, I was more bothered by the pain.

I was staying silent for a reason, yet I ended up coughing violently. To such a lame me, Sieg just softly patted my back.

I told Sieg that it was a strong drink. After receiving it, she hesitated for a moment and took a sip. Without coughing, she drank it. She murmured that it indeed was a strong drink and returned the flask.

An hour later. Somewhere far away, I could hear dogs barking. It seemed that they were chasing after a deer.

I ordered Sieg to move a little back and then waited for the dogs, while holding my gun up.

After I waited for a while, two dogs appeared, chasing a deer.

I blew my whistle for the next order. Then, one dog circled the deer and stopped it in its tracks.

Now was the chance to shoot. Sieglinde took her shot first.

One shot.

The bullet pierced the deer's neck. It was also a spot that killed the creature in one shot.

The moment the deer collapsed, I ordered the dogs to disperse, then approached the fallen prey.

"Sieg, you did it."

"Yeah."

I went closer and confirmed the kill. The caught deer was a female one, about a year old.

The tastiest meat comes from small female ones. Male ones had uneven clumps of tasteless fat.

There was no time to just at the prey in admiration.

Because it is better to drain the blood and butcher the deer quickly.

Using the slope in the forest, we let it bleed from its neck as we took it home.

When we arrived home, we took it to the hut and asked Teoporon for help. We tied its hind legs and hung it up on a hook hanging from the ceiling.

The female deer's fur shined beautifully. For later use, I skinned from the legs. Thanks to Sieg, I was able to do it in half the usual time.

After skinning it together, we then tore its belly with a big knife and gutted it. During that process, I checked if there were any parasites in its liver and bile duct, then threw it out. With a wet cloth, we cleaned the meat. Then a pouch full of snow was placed inside it, and it was left for a night.

The day after, I carved the meat by the parts.

Roughly by its body, behind, legs, and neck. It is then matured for about ten days, then it is divided into more parts.

Normally, it needs to be aged for about a month to be perfect, but unfortunately our guest is arriving in two weeks.

"Well, like this, there's no worry over meat."

"Yeah."

Other than that, we hunted rabbits and birds and froze them under the snow. I suggested to hunt one more reindeer, but Sieg stopped me from doing that.

In two weeks, I will be going out to meet Sieg's acquaintance.

I took five hours to get to the port the before his arrival, then spent an awkward night with Teoporon.

The next day.

It was almost time for the ferry to arrive, so I waited at the pier.

Since he already knew who to look for, I told Teoporon that he will come for us and continued to wait.

A few minutes later.

Finally one man came and talked to us.

“——Er, erm, might you be, Count, Levantret?”

The man who spoke in our language, albeit rather poorly, was a tall, blond-haired and blue-eyed man of a refreshing disposition.

## Chapter 20 - Emmerich David's Activity Report

It started on the first day when I was assigned to the elite contingent.

There was one person that had a slender figure in the unit full of burly men, so I felt curiosity at this disharmony. When I heard the story, it seemed that that person was from a powerful noble family. That moment, my question disappeared.

The army is merit-based, but it is also easy to advance in position from one's family's influence.

When I talked to that fair-faced noble, I found out that the boy also was assigned to the unit on the same day. Though it was a little, we started chatting in between our drills.

That was the meeting with Sieglinde von Wattin.

I want to go back in time and hit myself back then who thought of her as a noble boy.

She, Sieglinde, is an honourable and clever noblewoman.

Through some sort of fate, Sieglinde and I spent along time together in the same unit.

There were also many times when she saved my life..... though there were some vexing occasions.

The most embarrassing time was when we were stranded in the snowy mountains. When I went with Sieglinde to hunt for food, I was rammed by a deer and fell unconscious.

She killed the deer on the spot, but after weighing the values, she decided to save my life.

Well, since there were many dying soldiers even if she went back, it was a wrong choice she made to have abandoned the food and take a fallen man back. However, her decision to haul me back and treat my wounds saved my life.

I realised that I had feelings for her when I heard rumours that she was looking for a marriage partner.

From my overflowing newfound feelings, I was in confusion.

Sieglinde is older than me. She also is from a good family.

Though she refused promotion and stayed in the same rank as myself, but she had more decorations than me.

I had been giving up the idea of proposing to such a woman.

But even for a man like me, an opportunity came. I heard from her uncle and superior that Sieglinde is participating in a ball to find a marriage partner.

“No one is going propose to me anyway,” she had been saying, so I was betting my chances on that.

Also, it might have been hard to propose to her in her military uniform, but if I saw her in a dress, I was confident that I could find the courage to propose to her.

The ball came. I met with the worst possible situation.

Sieglinde appeared in her military uniform, and even wore her decorations that she did not usually wear.

—— She was shining brilliantly. Really, she felt like someone that someone like me should approach.

I don't know if it was the glint from her medals or her brilliance that blinded me then.

Being surrounded by women, Sieg was quickly separated from others.

When I went outside to take a breather and came back in, she was nowhere to be seen.

I then heard that Sieglinde was proposed to by ‘the Yeti of the Borderlands (Lappland)’<sup>13</sup> and that her marriage was concluded.

I demanded to know what kind of man he was, and he turned out to a count from another country. He is from an old house, and his status was fitting for her.

I felt at a big loss. She did not even look at me and was taken away, or so I was assaulted by this arbitrary anxiety.

However, it was too late. I don’t know much about this Yeti who sounded like a bear, but I got the impression that Sieglinde will be spending a barbaric life in the borderlands.

However, I was surprisingly persistent.

Thinking of the land she will be going, I thought of it as the worst possible choice.

I felt worried for her.

Also, there was the fact that I wouldn’t be able to see her soon. Finally, I went to her house and proposed to her.

As expected, her answer started with “I’m happy that you see me that way,” but ended tragically with “but I have a fiancé.”

That was how I parted with her.

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13 Sorry, 雪人 meant yeti rather than snowman in Japanese. Or should I keep snowman as in ‘abominable snowman’?

Some months after that shock, I disembarked on that foreign land.

This was the country Sieg married away to.

I came here to see if she was living happily here.

I already did expect it to some degree when I came out of the ship cabin, but it was quite cold. Rather, it was biting.

I wonder if this what it means to feel pain from gales? .....No, this doesn't seem to be it. I thought I as I disembarked.

On Sieglinde's letter, she told me to look for a white bear. Her husband and her servant will come and get me.

However, I was mistaken about the method of transport. Who could have imagined that reindeer sleighs were still important in an age in which steam cars were being invented.

What do you mean by white bear, I want more details Sieglinde! I thought as I wandered about.

Then I realised it. That her husband's nickname is definitely 'the Bear of the Borderlands'.

Sieglinde's husband must have been as big as a bear and must have been bulging with muscles. I imagined that she must have fallen for a man that was stronger than her.

I was adequately tall, but I was thin for a man of the military. When I heard from my grandfather that our genes made it hard to gain muscles, I felt despair.

I was not fit to her taste so I was rejected, or so I consoled myself as I walked on foreign lands.

As I waded through the crowd, I noticed something.

—— It was a white bear.

For a moment, I really thought it was bear and dropped my luggage. But on a closer look, it was a giant wearing bear fur.

Th-that's Sieglinde's husband!?

Thick arms, great chest muscles, and a ripped belly that was almost disgusting to look at. That appearance had a wildness that my instinct appealed me to not approach hi.

He wasn't wearing anything other than the bear fur (though he did have trousers on). Was that force a proof of his life in this arctic land.

——S-scary.

Pathetically, such emotions formed.

When I looked to the side of Sieglinde's bearish husband, there was a man that looked like a servant so I looked to him for help.

Unlike the man-bear that had brown skin, that man, as though he lacked pigments, had white skin, white hair and blue eyes that had a beautiful shade like a gem. I felt sure that this was the servant that Sieg mentioned in her letter.

Unable to face the lionessque man-bear, I talked while looking at the servant.

Might you be Count Levantret I asked.

I then presented myself as Emmerich David in the language spoken here that I learned before I came.

“Ah, it’s alright. I can speak David-san’s country’s language!”

Oo, thank goodness. The servant can translate. He also kindly took my bags. I relaxed at seeing this friendly servant.

As we talked, I felt that the man was good, so I told him that he didn’t have to speak politely.

“He’s Teoporon. We can’t communicate well with him, but he’s a good man.”

“——Pardon?”

Because I was wearing the earmuffs the servant gave me, I didn’t hear him well, but strode on regardless.

I followed him, taking care to not look at the bearish husband.

Thankfully, unlike my fears, the sleigh was wider than I thought.

Of course, there was no roof, and the reindeer was too big. Moreover——.

“Then, sit in between Teoporon’s legs.”

“.....”

This ‘Teoporon’ he’s been speaking of, is this a word in his language? I wanted to know the meaning, but I wasn’t able to speak because of the cold.

The servant smiled nicely and asked me to sit in between Sieglinde’s bear-like husband’s legs.

“The sleigh is quite fast.”

“.....”

The servant explained that he'll be controlling the reins, and that I'll sitting with the bear, on top of that in between his legs, on a linked sleigh.

Thus, as I entrusted myself to this middle-aged man, the sleigh started moving.

The long trip was miserable.

First, the sleigh was scary. It was fast, and I was scared that I might get thrown off any moment. If I didn't have my body secured by the bear, I imagined that I would have had myself hurled onto the snow already.

We proceeded while resting on the way, but the food did not fit my taste. The deer meat was sinewy and hard, and the herbs that probably were used to get rid of the smell were also exotic. The bread was black, made from barley, and was as hard as rocks. Even in their drinks, the wine was spiced. I wondered why they would do such a thing, but feeling my body warm up soon I somewhat understood.

Sieglinde's husband never said a word. The only comfort was the young man who consoled me on this hard trip.

He had a thin line that suggested that facial hair might not even grow on him, and for a man there was an ephemeral mood to him.

While I was thinking that, the sleigh suddenly stopped. The servant suddenly took out his gun and shot something, then squinted. He got off the sleigh, apologising, and brought something back.

In the servant's hand was a white rabbit. Apparently, it was a rare species, so he was happy to be able to gift this.

The rabbit carcass was placed by my feet. I could feel its legs go hard from rigor mortis. I murmured, "sorry, sorry" for some reason.

The man did not look very dependable, but he was still a proper hunter.

The sunlight slowly went away. When I checked the clock, it was still the afternoon.

Anyway, travelling in the dark was frightening. There was only a small lantern to light the way.

Even as I felt nerve-wracked, we somehow arrived at the village.

At the end, I couldn't even walk properly, that Sieglinde's husband carried me on his back.

White bear hair, it's warm.

Like so, while I was entrusting my legs to someone else's waist, we arrive.

"I'm back! Sieg, Sieglinde!"

".....?"

For some reason the servant called Sieglinde. And he even skipped the honorifics.

The husband took away the reindeers and the sleighs, and there was only the servant, myself and Sieglinde who just came out.

"Welcome."

From meeting each other after a long time, Sieglinde greeted with a smile. I wondered if I should dare sharing a hug while her husband was away, but the next word was completely unexpected.

"——Did you really think I would say that?!"

“H-hii~ ~!!”

From the sudden loud noise, I flinched.

“——?”

Narrowing her eyes and staring at me with scary eyes, my old colleague did something unexpectedly.

She hopped lightly on the spot, and then raised her knees, running over here. Without dropping her speed, she spun and kicked me.

“Gueffu!!”

Of course I didn't expect an attack, so I ended up collapsing on the spot.

Even here, the kind-hearted servant ran up to me and lent me a hand.

“.....Wattin, why”

“Wattin is my old surname. Call me Countess Levantret now.”

“.....H-how harsh.”

“You're the one that's being harsh on us. Coming at this season!”

“.....”

I was definitely not welcome. I felt a little sad.

“Let's go inside.”

“.....”

Still supporting me up, the servant brought me inside.

I glared at Sieglinde, because I could not accept how someone I met today was being kinder to me than someone I knew from many years ago.

“Ritz, you don’t need to feel sympathy for this man.”

So this man’s name was Ritz.

Ritz, you really are a good person.

But then I found out something absurd inside.

This kind Ritz-kun was Sieglinde’s husband.

“Why did you have such a misunderstanding?”

“No, the Count was nicknamed as ‘the Man-bear of the Borderlands’!”

“It’s not man-bear, but yeti.”

“Ah, well, really??”

When I said that, Sieglinde scowled at me.

I said that I could make a mistake in an attempt to calm her down, but she would not listen.

“Well, since he came a long way, it would be nice if he has good time here.”

“Th-thank-”

“.....Indeed. We’ll have him enjoy life here!”

“!?”

I was happy that Ritz-kun welcomed me, but I only got bad vibes from what Sieglinde said.

The next day, I was sentenced to harsh work by Sieglinde.

Ritz-kun tried to not make me work stating that I am a guest, but because Sieglinde strongly argued that people here need to work, he just left the words, “.....Sorry,” and disappeared.

I did not even have the time to think that she was in the dominant position in their relationship before I was given a new task.

Walking dogs, digging, drawing water.

The worst was butchering animals. Even here, I ended up saying “Sorry, sorry” as I cut them.

Still, meals after working tasted better. The cook in this house was great, all the food was really tasty.

Even the deer meat that my body rejected on the way here was tasty in this house. Food just kept going down my neck.

Also, Sieglinde looked happy.

The colour of her face looked better than when she was in the army. Her expressions seemed to be brighter as well.

Ritz-kun was treating her well too. As if she were the world’s sole treasure.

There were no cracks in between the two of them. Anyone could see that they were a great couple.

Like so, my stay at this faraway village ended.

As for my return trip, there coincidentally was a merchant going to the port so I paid him to take me there.

“Thanks for your kindness.”

“Yeah.”

“Come and visit us again!”

When she heard Ritz-kun’s request, Sieglinde made him shut his mouth. I laughed at how harsh she was.

I did not have any more business in this village. Or so I thought, but there was an unexpected meeting.

I fell in love at first sight with a woman I met on my way back. I decided to visit the village again after it thawed.

While traveling from country to country close to her, I eventually retired from the military and settled at the village, but that is a story for another time.

## Chapter 21 - Goddess Worship

Once we finished receiving our guest Sieg's acquaintance, our life returned to its normal cycle.

I was worried about what kind of relationship they had, but they simply were just friends.

Emmerich said that Ruruporon's food was delicious, and even the hunted deer meat seemed to fit his taste so it was a relief.

It was also nice to my usually handsome wife's unexpected side. That even Sieg would sometimes rush out and assault someone so hard.

"Sorry about making you worry."

"No no, it was fun. However, I was surprised to hear that Emmerich once proposed to you."

"....."

Sieg's former colleague Emmerich David said that he had something to talk about the night he arrived and confessed.

That he proposed to Sieg.

He started softly speaking while the three of us were having a meal, so I had no idea how I should react.

Emmerich said that after he received that kick he realised that it was not love that he felt for Sieg.

"He didn't really have to say that during our mealtime."

"Yeah? But I felt relieved."

"Why"

“Frankly, I was worried. Our guest, your former colleague was man, but neither a friend, so I was worrying over what kind of relationship you had.”

“It’s just a nasty relationship we have.”

“Right, I’m glad. I mean it.”

“.....”

The feelings Emmerich had for Sieg was admiration, and it seemed that he proposed to her while he did not understand his feelings well enough.

I was bothered about that all the time, so I was really glad that he told the story himself.

Just that, I felt that my open personality did not help at these times.

Since this sort of thing happened, I resolved to ask questions whenever I have something I am curious about.

Sieg’s friend Emmerich was a great man.

He helped with work during his stay, and he even furtively told tales of Sieg’s heroics.

“He was an interesting person. I wonder when he’ll visit next?”

“Well, he even cried tears because of the cold, he might not visit anymore.”

“I see~”

“He is a sensitive person,” laughed Sieg. I was jealous of how close they were, but they became like that after spending a long time together. I also hope that I can quickly become like that with Sieg.

Emmerich and I also agreed on a cultural exchange. He took an interest in the folklore and crafts of this land.

While looking forward to our next meeting, our guest reception went well without any big accidents.

“Now then, let’s get to work.”

“Alright.”

Another busy day awaited us today.



Once the polar nights are over, the villagers get restless about preparing for the flea market. There, one can garner a lot of wealth.

In this village, wealth was represented by one’s reindeers, but nowadays silver is preferred to flaunt one’s wealth. Usually used as accessories for clothes, or as decorations for hats.

Most of the money people earn at the market is used to buy silver.

“Interesting culture.”

“Well, I suppose it’s possible because we are self-sufficient.”

“Yeah..... by the way, what’s this?”

Touching the flower shaped decoration on her coat, she asked.

“That was something my mother told me to give to my wife.”

“I see. It’s good.”

“Though it was hard to maintain it.”

Even though I am a Sami, I have no interest in silver. The money I earn from the market is saved up for emergencies.

The only product I am using might be just a flask for holding alcohol. That was something my rich paternal grandfather gave me as a gift when I became the lord.

If silver is not cleaned frequently, it quickly turns. It really made me respect people who had many silver things. The accessories on the clothes I use are made from carving antlers, so there's only the flask I am cleaning.

We talked about the goods as we headed to the front door.

Sieg will be learning how to craft traditional bracelets from the women at the souvenir store. Since the table for lining up goods are empty in this season, they seem to be using that.

As to why this happened, it all started from when Sieg got closer to the women when she went out on her strolls. Her special ability to charm women also worked in many countries.

Thanks to Sieg attracting people even here, miraculously, our house would finally learn how to make bracelets.

Carving things out of hard birch, like cups, dishes and spoons are the men's job, but making bracelets and accessories are the women's job. There are many crafters in this village. The mothers and fathers of the households have been succeeding the traditional crafting over generations.

"Then, see you later."

"Have a safe trip..... be careful of the elderly people."

"Understood."

After advising that there are some xenophobic elderly people who sometimes get violent, I let Sieg go. After that, I also started working.

Today, I will be making wooden dolls.

It's not a traditional craft, but something I started on my own. After hearing on the flea market that dolls of small animals are popular, I tried making it.

The first work, an adult white bear, did not sell well, but the baby bears sold well so now the shopkeeper lady is even urging me to make more quickly.

While I was carving more baby bears since the tourist season was coming around, Miruporon brought brought a lantern into the room.

"Oh, it's already dark."

Before I realised it, it had gotten dark. It seems that I was working only from the light from the fireplace.

"Hey, Miruporon, where's Sieg?"

Holding up my index finger, which meant mother, I asked about Sieg's whereabouts. Miruporon shook her head. Sieg's not back yet.

Here in this village we normally stay outside only until sunset.

I was worried, so I picked up the lantern and decided to go get Sieg.

From the store that usually closed when it got dark, light was flowing out of the windows.

Since the lady here usually closes up and goes home after dark, I thought it rare and peeked in.

"——H-huh?"

In the store, there were many women ranging from teenagers to women in their fifties. In the centre, there was Sieg. It was like the concubine's hall I once saw in an old picture.

‘How did it come to this,’ I thought as I was about to open the doors. Suddenly a hand was placed on my shoulder, so I let out a yelp.

When I calmed down and turned around, there was a girl reputed as ‘the village’s prettiest girl’.

Her name is Aina Salonen Bergholm.

She’s also famous for having the strongest personality among the village girls. She had white hair and blue eyes, which was not rare around these parts, but a passing merchant said that her facial features were unlike anyone here.

By the way, the name ‘Salonen’ between our first name and surname means ‘people of the forest’. As proof that we are from this village, people here all call themselves Salonen.

I tilted my head at this situation wondering why she was grabbing my shoulder.

“Eh, what?”

“——Right!?”

“Heh?”

Aina is sixteen years old. She is quite tall and looks mature, but she is still at an age where she could be called a girl.

Looking somewhat hurried, she tightly squeezed my shoulder with her right hand.

“Erm, Aina? Can you say that again?”

“.....”

“Come on, it’s cold.”

I had no coats on. Aina too had earmuffs, but no hats, gloves and coats.

A while later, she made up her mind and said it.

——You're here to become a member of people who like Sieglinde-sama, right?

“Eh, what's that?”

“You were peeking inside without even knowing that?”

“Ha?”

“That's the meeting of people who like Sieglinde-sama.”

“.....”

“Like that, while she is being taught about traditional crafting, we spend some time talking.”

“H-heh~”

I was at a loss for such an organisation springing up.

“So, to talk with Sieglinde-sama, you have to pay a membership fee to the owner here.

“W-why?”

“I-if you are caught talking with a foreigner, you'll be scolded by old people, right? So the lady is charging a rental fee? or something like that.”

“Aa, I see.”

Being run by a foreign lady, elderly people with old ideas don't approach here. I was impressed at how she money off that fact.

“.....So?”

“.....”

I sort of already knew, but I asked nonetheless.

Her grandparents hate foreigners. So I guessed that there was something about Sieg.

“Stop chatting about and o it! I’ll go in together with you!”

“Hey, wait, Sieg is my wife.”

I was forced inside.

“This is a rare sight.”

“Hello.”

“.....”

“My lord, are the baby bears completed yet?”

“N-not yet.”

“Please hurry up.”

“Yes.”

Hiding behind me, Aina was grabbing my arm and stayed silent. Because of her grandparents, she never came to this store before.

As if she was threatening me, she rolled a fist in my side. It hurt.

“Ah, sorry. Erm, she wants to go in that Sieglinde club.”

“Ah, right!”

Inside, with Sieg at the centre, there was a strange mood.

From a drawer under the counter, she took out a wooden bracelet with flower patterns.

“Five markkas.”

The bracelets usually cost about four markkas. I stared at the owner lady for an explanation.

“There’s also the danger money for when we’re caught.”

“Ah, I see.”

If this secret meeting is found out by the elderly people, it seems that the owner lady here is taking all the blame.

“Aina, it’s five markkas.”

“.....”

While using me as a shield, she placed a bracelet and a small patch of fur on the counter. It seems she’s bartering because she doesn’t have money. After she received the flower-patterned bracelet, my side was finally liberated from her fist.

The owner lady was about to close up, so she went inside to tell that it was time to disperse.

I was about to say to Aina, ‘It’s unfortunate that you couldn’t speak with Sieg today,’ but she was looking at the bracelet joyfully so I decided not to.

“Ah, that’s right!”

“Hm?”

While I was staring at Sieg who was soothing a girl who started crying, Aina spoke to me.

“Did you have a foreign guest some time ago?”

“Are you talking about Emmerich?”

“I don’t know his name!”

“Was there something?”

“.....He suddenly asked for name in poor language so I ignored.”

“.....I-I see.”

So he tried to pick up a pretty girl? As expected of someone who came this far out just for Sieg. Well, I can understand him though. I also proposed because I fell in love at first sight.

“If it’s someone you know, tell him to not speak to me again.”

“Why not?”

“He’s a foreigner!”

“Hehh.”

“What!”

“What’s that in your hand then?”

“!”

Aina looked at the flower-patterned bracelet in surprise, then put it in her pocket.

“R-remember this!”

With a mysterious line, Aina left the store.

After stopping the child’s crying, Sieg and I took her home and then returned home.



## Chapter 22 - Not Alone

After we returned home, I asked how she got so close with the women of the village. She replied that they got friendly while they were talking.

However, leaving aside the young women who were used to foreigners, I couldn't help but wonder at how older women at her mother's age easily opened up to her.

Also, we started the tourism business only a few decades ago.

It's something that can't be helped, so the topic was over then.

The next day, when I turned in the completed baby bear figures after the wax dried, the owner lady told me the story of how Sieglinde-ism formed.

Sieg's hobby is taking strolls every morning.

Meanwhile, it seems that many things happened.

"The lady at Holm-san's place, her husband hurt his back."

When the lady was trying to remove the snow from the roof, Sieg passed by. She then offered to remove the snow herself. She even did so until the husband's back healed.

"She came everyday to remove the snow, and when the lady asked her name to thank her, she just said, 'I'm not anyone great to name myself' and valiantly left."

Other than that, she helped people with chopping wood, drawing water, and even walked dogs for others. Though Sieg was being humble, she did help all the working ladies on her stroll.

"I see. So that's why everyone's her follower."

“This is what happened. Plus she’s a hunk.”

“Though she’s a woman.”

“Everyone knows, I think everyone’s just feeling yearnful.”

“Hmm.”

Indeed, work in the morning is tough. Most men do not work in the morning, so women do the work in the morning. Sieg might have been a healing factor for them.

“By the way, I wonder what happened between the daughter from Bergholm-san’s place and Sieglinde-san.”

“.....”

I could somewhat guess how Sieg and Aina met. Some time ago, Sieg mentioned at breakfast that she helped a woman that was being chased by a boar. Isn’t that Aina? I guessed.

In addition, Sieg did not say that she was there, and was thinking about telling her or not.

In this village, women can assist with catching reindeers, and although it’s limited to small animals they sometimes hunt as well. However, that is usually only done during emergencies, such as when the head of the house has collapsed from illness or injury.

I did not hear any news of Bergholm family’s head falling from illness or injury.

I usually keep hearing such news from visiting merchants.

In that house, there are no men in the prime of their life. Aina’s father died early, and she is living with her mother and her grandparents.

She is the only daughter, but because of her strong personality she did not care much about marriage. From their circumstances, I feel that it’s better if she married quickly, but since the person in question has no plans to I can’t help it.

Though there is only an elderly man there, her grandfather is the best hunter in the village. Thus, there is no need for Aina for hunt, but since he might have gotten injured or sick so I decided to visit them out of worry.

However, it turned out that I was unduly worried.

I coincidentally saw Aina's grandfather haul back a large boar back on his reindeer sleigh.

“——Ah!”

Found Aina!

Seeing her sneak about, I talked to her from behind her.

“What are you doing there?”

“Hi!”

In her hands, there were an old-looking bow and handmade arrows. It was certain that Aina was using old hunting goods.

“Aina, your grandfather's healthy, why are you trying to go out hunting?”

“I-it's not like you need to know, right!?”

“It's dangerous.”

“.....”

“Just a while ago, I saw your grandfather hauling back a nice boar, you know?”

When I said those things, Aina shot a ferocious glare at me.

And then she vented out her anger on me.

“As if the lord would know my feelings!”

Aina threw the bow and arrows on the ground and ran off.

I couldn't chase after her. Teenage girls are difficult. She wouldn't listen even if I tried to persuade her.

Even though I still felt clouded, I returned home.



"I was thinking of going out to get you."

"Sorry."

Sieg was waiting for my return on the porch. Since I normally return straight away after turning in the goods at the store, she was worried that I was late.

"It started snowing."

"Yeah."

Sieg gently brushed off the snow off the shoulders.

".....What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just thought that it is an impossible hope to want to be happy without taking everyone else into consideration."

"That can't be helped."

"....."

The elderly people staunchly reject changing their way of life. However, the young people wish for change.

Sieg said that time will solve it.

“If there are any families having trouble, I want to support them.”

“Yes, of course. But don’t overexert yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s not a matter that you should take it all on yourself.”

“.....Yup.”

After that, Sieg brewed me some coffee.

Even my heart warmed back up, so I thanked her giving me the strength to work again.



The seasons changed, and even here spring visited.

Sadly, even though it’s spring, the snow didn’t melt yet.

The women of the village all go out to the flea market in the nearby port city.

There you can find processed goods made out of reindeer antlers, fur hats, shoes and coats, and also smoked meat.

Even among those, the relatively cheap birch cups and the crafts made out of reindeer leather are popular among the tourists who crossed the sea to come here.

Since it was the first time Sieg came to the market, we decided that we should sell goods together.

We’re selling wooden cups, spoons, and even a wooden carving of an eagle I made. I also laid out the bracelets Sieg made and the embroidered handkerchiefs.

When I attracted customers and Sieg faintly smiled, the goods sold quickly. A little after lunchtime, most of the goods sold out.

“Amazing, we only have three left.”

“This is a surprise. Normally it takes about two days to sell everything.”

Was it all Sieglinde effect, or was it because we worked together?

Either way, I felt relieved that I did not have to pay the fee for setting up stall on the second day.

“I’m getting a bit hungry. I’ll go buy something to eat.”

I said and went to food carts.

This year there were many more people. Rather, it almost felt like it was the most I’ve ever seen here.

Wading through the crowd, I arrived at the street where there were food carts.

I first headed to the stall that sold pork sausage (makkara). The direct fired sausage on skewer is not slit open, so the skin was crisp and bouncy.

I ordered two, and received them, wrapped in paper with mustard on them.

Next, I headed to a food cart that sold bread.

When I was thinking of buying something that we didn’t usually eat, I saw something piled.

Named ‘a slap on the ear (korvapuusti)’, this bread is made by applying plenty of butter on the surface and sprinkling sugar and spices. The outside is crispy, and its unique sweet spice smell tickles the nose. Thinking of buying some as souvenir for the Rangos, I bought about twenty nice sized loaves.

Finally, I bought salmon soup (Lohikeitto). We always had smoked fish. So when the shopkeeper said that it's made from fresh salmon, I was immensely attracted.

The shopkeeper said that it's made using milk. Since milk is hard to get in the village, it's a luxury. The stock is made using seasonal root vegetables and fresh salmon, with plenty of cheese and spices. The soup was being boiled slowly while steam was rising. I bought enough for two people.

From buying food, both my hands were full. I decided to buy the drinks later and returned through a less crowded route.

"Oh, it's sold out."

"It just sold out."

Even the spoons that weren't selling sold out. On the now empty table, I laid out the food I bought.

"I'll go buy the drinks."

Without waiting for my reply, she went out. A few minutes later, she returned holding coffee for two.

Sold in bottles, the coffee was full of milk and sugar. It warmed the body soothingly.

All the food we bought were tasty. I thought for a moment that it's quite nice going out together with Sieg to eat, but since tourists will start coming for auroras we will be getting busy. There is no time to laze around.

After resting, when I stood up, Sieg grabbed my wrist.

"What is it?"

Sieg was searching for something in her pocket. When I wondered what was up, she started coiling something up on my wrist.

“Ah!”

It was a traditional ornament made with reindeer leather, embedded with tin. For the clamp, it was made out of a reindeer antler.

“Sieg, this is?”

“My first good product.”

“Handmade?”

“Yeah.”

Sieg gifted me with a handmade bracelet.

I was overwhelmed by joy, and I ended up standing there without being able to say anything.

Seeing me like that, Sieg explained that she was still poor at it, so I shook my head in denial.

“Sieg, thank you so much. I’m happy.”

“Is that so.”

“.....”

“.....”

To give her a kiss of thanks, I brought my face closer, but I remembered that she made a troubled face just before the lips touched.

So I stopped, and paid a visit to her ear.

“Erm, Sieg, can I kiss you?”

“.....”

Wonderfully ignored. As I thought, it's not possible. I hung my head.

When I was about to look up and laugh it off, she opened her mouth.

“——It's fine if it's back home.”

“!?”

From her unexpected permission, I was shaken up.

I ended up going back home in this restless state.

## Chapter 23 - Closer Distance

“Then, shall we go back.”

After preparing the reindeer sleigh, I told Sieg that the preparations for going back were done.

When we were coming here with luggage, the two sleighs were connected, but during the long polar nights I made a sleigh with a bed that the two of us could ride.

I got on first, and then stretched out my hand to Sieg.

“What’s wrong?”

“Eh? No, nothing.”

It must have raised her suspicion when I turned around immediately after I checked up on her. To not see my wife’s face, I turned my head.

Unlike the previous sleighs, this one has backrests so our bodies aren’t touching each other, but because Sieg’s words of “It’s fine if it’s back home” did not leave my head, I moved awkwardly.

“.....”

“We’re departing.”

“I’m in your care.”

“Yes.”

.....Oh no. I’m being too conscious of it.

I regretted that I should have just ended it with a kiss on the cheek.

Of course, if Sieg says yes, I would gladly do so. However, the regret was from my own state right now.

When I stared up at the sky, there was a clear blue sky. To get back before the sun set, I ordered the reindeers to move.

The scenery is still wintry. The forest is still dyed in white.

“Ah, deers.”

A few ways from the sleigh’s route, there were deers running on the snow-covered plains.

Having the same colour as the snow, there was a herd of seven deers. Normally, I would gladly pursue them, but since in this period I didn’t hunt I moved alongside the deers.

When the sun was draping over the horizon, we arrived home. I relaxed at the fact that we were able to return before dark. Miruporon came out to greet me. I gave her the spiced bread I brought as souvenir, to which she pounded her chest as a sign of gratitude. Though her facial muscles did not twitch a bit. To my ever unchanging servant, I said, “I’m back,” and went inside.

Since the bath was prepared, I offered Sieg the bath first.

As I waited in the living room, Ruruporon brought me a warm berry drink.

“Thank you.”

Ruruporon smiled refreshingly and pounded her chest as she went away.

It’s hardly necessary to say, but Miruporon really did take after her father.

When I was left alone again, I rolled up my sleeves and felt the exquisite tin ornament with my fingers.

I remembered that my father boasted about his bracelet that he got from mother a long time ago.

Mother was a good crafter in the village, and made a tin ornament in the shape of snow flakes.

I was envious of that, so I asked him many times to give it to me, but father's reply would always be, "Ask your wife when you marry," a cold rejection. He definitely must have been unpopular.

While I was deep in thought, Sieg finished her bath.

"Sieg."

"What."

For the person of merit today, I offered her my seat. When I gestured, she put a hand on her chest, bent her knees slightly and then sat down.

"Thank you for today. Making goods, looking after the stall."

"Not really, it's something expected of a wife."

"....."

"You don't need to thank me every time."

".....Okay."

From Sieg's blunt but warm words, I felt much calmer.

As for her, she might just be holding up her contract as a temporary wife. However, that did not stop me from hoping that she might be seriously become my wife through her efforts.

I had so many things going on in my head, but what came out of my mouth was something ridiculous.

"——Hey, Sieg, remember what you said at the market?"

The moment she heard that, Sieg's face froze. There was only regret in my head.

I was anxious that she might call it out as a breach of contract.

However, her response was completely unexpected.

"Of course I do."

".....Yes?"

"Didn't you hear me?"

"No."

D-does this mean kissing is fine!?

When I slowly extended my hand and touched her cheeks, which were soft and tender from just coming out the bath, I was stared by those raptor-like eyes. However, now, even that gaze excited me.

Well, if she didn't like it, wouldn't I have been kicked away like Emmerich. As if my weak state just then was a lie, I sprung into action.

"Sieg, please close your eyes."

"....."

Today, my wife was obedient.

After confirming that she closed her eyes, I approached. Since it would be dismal if I got hated from kissing her on the lips, I kissed right next to them.

When I pulled back, Sieg too opened her eyes.

Her beautiful grey eyes were dyed in a mysterious shade.

“Sorry.”

“No, no need for an apology.”

“.....”

“.....”

I couldn’t even laugh off this awkward mood.

When I came back to the living room after taking a bath, Sieg behaved as usual, so I felt deeply relieved that we could return to our usual enjoyable life tomorrow.



It was a refreshing morning where the clear sky laid itself out. After finishing our meals I went out to the forest with Sieg.

Even deep inside the forest, the snow started melting. The silver world was thinning away.

This time, the purpose is not hunting. Since it’s a season when most animals give birth, there’s an unspoken rule that we do not hunt in this period.

“Ah, this is the tree.”

At the birch tree I was looking for, we stopped.

“Is there something different about this?”

“Yeah. It’s thicker than the other trees.”

Today we are here to tap tree saps.

Considered as a gift of the forest, the precious saps are created from trees absorbing water from melted snow. These saps can only be tapped in this season, during only one month.

The method is simple. The surface is cut, and a pipe connected to a container is put on that cut. Just by leaving it for a night, quite a large amount can be gathered.

“How are these saps used?”

“The women use it for beauty. It’s also used as an ingredient for creating powder for brushing teeth, and it’s sometimes boiled and used instead of sugar.”

“Hehh. So it’s a panacea.”

“Yeah.”

What was that, I remember father researching the substances in the birch saps.

Ah, xylitol! I think that was it. It had an effect of killing the germs in the mouth, and it is also used as a sweetener in foreign countries. Considering that people of old times did not realise that there were such substances, I thought that ancient wisdom was amazing.

After setting up many containers to collect tree sap, we left.

The next morning, when we went back to that birch tree the containers were filled with sap. Trying to not spill, we carefully returned.

Of course, sap can’t be used as is. With a fine cloth, the impurities have to be filtered out.

I spent a day filtering saps.

As saps aren’t preserved for long, we have to work fast.

The saps can be used as beauty wash for only a few days. Thus, they are combined into soap, drank as is, or used for cooking.

“Can I get some?”

“Of course.”

I handed over a small bottle full of birch sap.

“Beauty wash?”

“Aa. I was thinking that my freckles might disappear.”

“Eh!? You’re getting rid of your freckles!? Why!? They’re cute!”

“.....”

Sieg narrowed her eyes. It was as though she was denouncing me.

“.....Your freckles, it’s very light that you have to get close to see it, so I don’t think you need to erase them.”

“.....”

“Hey, Sieg, is drinking sap tasty?”

“.....”

Sieg still looked at me with a stern gaze.

I couldn’t say that Sieg worrying over freckles was cute even if mouth was to be torn.

“When did you check my skin?”

“I wonder when~”

Slowly backing away, I planned my escape.

“Then, I’ll be taking my leave.”

“Wait!”

I turned around and was about to exit, but I was seized by the scruff of my neck.

And then I received a strict interrogation from Sieg who returned to being a soldier.

## Chapter 24 - Work in Spring

Today, I went out with Sieg early in the morning. Riding on a reindeer sleigh, we went to a nearby lake.

The lake was still faintly covered with snow.

“Is it okay?”

Sieg was worried about walking on top of the lake. Although the ice did thin from the temperature rising, it's not yet thin enough for it to crack from a person walking on it.

However, just in case, took one step and checked if it was safe. Since it was the thawing season, the snow on the surface was wet now. This was something I experienced every year.

“It's okay.”

“.....”

I took my still worried wife's hands and started walking on the frozen lake.

“Ritz, what about the reindeer?”

“It's a smart one, so don't worry.”

“Is that so.”

I separated the reindeer from the sleigh to let it move freely. It won't be going too far off, and bears, lynxes and wolverines don't live around this area, I explained to Sieg.

Sieg was at first worried about the ice, but once she started walking on it, she strode confidently. However, she kept holding my hand. Though it was over the gloves, my face became loose from the fact that I could touch her.

Because she was looking at my profile interestedly, I quickly brought up a new topic.

“Have you ever done ice fishing?”

“It’s the first time.”

Ice fishing is done by punching a hole through the ice and fishing there. In winter, the ice too thick to break to it’s done in early spring.

“In the cold season, arctic chars are the best.”

They have a pink shade, and taste nice. Now, their fat has risen so it’s tastiest now. Because I also wanted to salt and smoke some, I hoped to catch many of them as I prepared to drill a hole in the middle of the lake.

While I was bringing out the tools from the bag, Sieg wiped away the snow from the surface.

I’m using an ice pick. Aiming the blade at the ice, I softly struck down to create a hole. If I did it too hard, there is a possibility that all the ice in the surrounding area will collapse, so I must be careful.

The ice was thicker than I expected. Taking shifts with Sieg, we finally made a round hole in the ice.

I made a hole big enough for a large arctic char to pass through, and made another hole some distance away.

Now that the preparations were over, all that was left was to fish.

The lures are handmade fake baits. I put that on the string and lowered them in.

“Sieg, are you faring fine against the cold?”

“Aa, I’m fine.”

“I see.”

Though the extremely cold season was past, white breath still comes out and the exposed face feels pain.

However, the sky was clear and blue so I did not feel depressed.

Sieg caught the first one. The best fisher in the village indeed, I praised her in my mind.

“What’s this?”

“A perch. Be careful of the spike on its tail fin.”

Sieg caught one that had black stripes. Since there is a sharp spike on its tail fin, it has to be cut with scissors. Though it’s past its tasty season, it still is very tasty if it’s grilled with spices until its surface is crispy.

Then, for an hour, nothing was caught.

I offered Sieg alcohol (that I couldn’t drink) to keep her body warm.

“Sieg, I don’t think we can catch more~. Shall we go back?”

“Let’s stay for a while longer.”

“Really? Are you fine with that?”

“Aa. I feel that I can catch some if I do it a little more.”

While we were talking like that, my body protested that it was hungry. Checking the time with my pocket watch, it was already well past noon.

Lunch was the black barley bread Ruruporon made with smoked meat and cheese.

While we were eating, Sieg suggested that we use bits of bread as bait, and that worked great.

Right after that, I was able to fish up five arctic chars.

“It really doesn’t catch well sometimes. It’s hard to keep watch sometimes.”

“I see.”

Sieg caught a small perch, a loach and an arctic char. It was great for being her first try.

I filled the bag with snow to keep the fish fresh and returned home.

When I blew the whistle, the reindeer trotted back here.

When I gave the fish to Ruruporon upon returning, she gladly received it. I could somehow convey to her that she should take three arctic chars back to her hom and that we will be using the rest for dinner.

Dinner. The dish today was made using fresh fishing, signalling that spring has come.

The perch and the loach are filled with herbs and grilled with salt. A char is served in a soup of reindeer milk, potato and herbs. There is also a grilled one, that we sprayed citrus juice over. They all went well with bread.

“I want to smoke some fish tomorrow, so can I go out again tomorrow?”

“Aa, I don’t mind.”

Thanks to my magnanimous lady, tomorrow’s schedule was decided on.

The next day, maybe because we lowered the strings on top a school of fish, we had a big haul of eighteen fish with just two people.

However, since we can't take of all that fish by ourselves, we sold half in the village before we smoked the rest.

First, the fish is gutted and cleaned, then split into two pieces. Then salt is applied all over them and then they're left. After that, it's left to sit in a soup of herbs and alcohol. The fish is then left to dry before they're smoked.

I'm using a method called cold smoking to preserve them for a long time. I'm using a handmade smoking racks. Since the temperature has to be controlled, it's done at a separate smokehouse.

Using birch chips and herbs that have been dried for half a year, it's smoked for a month.

"Sounds like it will take a long time."

"Yeah. We're doing this to get food over the winter."

Since we don't hunt in spring, this is the kind of work we usually do.

Now that the ground has thawed, we now have to get to farming.

We usually grow root vegetables like potatoes, turnips and carrots, along with onions, rapeseeds, rye and barley.

The crops are planted in spring, then are harvested in summer or autumn. They're then put in snow in winter. There was the fact that it allowed for long-term preservation, but the cold snow also sweetened the vegetables.

After the thawing, all the men in the village help in the fields. The fields outside the walls become a terrible sight after winter, so there is hard work waiting for us to till the field from the beginning.

It's not as though we planned on it beforehand, but we villagers naturally gathered around to wipe of the snow and till the fields. From the pressure from the piled up snow, the soil became hard so it's hard manual labour.

We silently continued to remove the stones, roots and caterpillars from the soil.

While I was working, an inquisitive village boy talked to me.

"Hey, my lord, you're not with the big wife today?"

"Big wife, that's harsh."

"But she is about the same height as you."

"Yeah, indeed."

My big wife Siegnlinde working in the village to prepare for tourists. While men work in the fields, the women are preparing to greet the foreigners.

They clean the inn, wash the beddings, make snacks and craft souvenirs.

Sieg said that she wanted to help with work in the field because she thought she wouldn't be of much help in the village. However, since farming blisters one's hands unlike hunting, I persuaded her to help the village women.

"What about my wife?"

"No, my mum was being envious."

"Of what?"

"That you're always together."

"Ah, stuff like that."

In the village, men and women's work are divided. Usually, men work outside and while women work inside or in the village. Since I have servants taking care of household chores, I had the fortune to work together with Sieg.

“Ah, speak of the devil.”

“Hm?”

The boy pointed to the village entrance. There, Sieg was coming over this way.

My wife brought me lunch.

It was afternoon now. Since I was planning on returning home about now, I was surprised at this sudden turn of events.

The surrounding villagers were quietly eating bread they brought from their homes. Since the village women are busy, they eat in the fields to not disturb them.

“Thank you, Sieg!”

Sieg wanted to eat with me too. To not get her wet, I laid down a leather bag for her to sit on.

I enjoyed warm bean soup, freshly baked bread and freshly brewed coffee as I chatted joyfully with Sieg.

As I was having my second cup of coffee after finishing my meal, Sieg said something while flashing her eyes sharply.

“By the way,”

“Hm?”

“I can feel gazes.”

“Well, that’s.....”

There were no women in the village that came to visit like Sieg. Without a doubt, the men were munching on the cold breads while thinking, 'This guy, I hope he explodes.' Thinking that, I smiled wryly.

"Are women forbidden here?"

"No, no. They're just envious."

"Of what?"

"That I'm having a meal with my wife."

After that, we resumed work.

It was a very exhausting work, but surprisingly after lunch all my fatigue had gone.

I spent the days contently, thinking that spring this time was much warmer than usual.

## Chapter 25 - The Taste of Chocolate

Now that we loosened the frozen soil, it was now time to put nutrients in the field for the vegetables to grow.

We put fallen leaves that we collected in autumn, weeds, and reindeer droppings in the soil.

Those are then left for a month.

If it's left for three months, they rot fully, but here in this region the period in which it does not snow is not long. So we can't afford to wait longer.

Returning home later than me, Sieg looked tired, a state she did not usually show.

"Welcome back."

"It got late. I am sorry."

"No, good work today."

Sieg flopped down on a chair by the window, and frowned.

"Tired?"

"Aa, yeah....."

"It's the first time you're doing it, that's why."

"There's that too, but,"

"?"

"It's tough working with strangers."

If Sieg said that, it must have been a tough work. I felt sorry for her.

“Are you okay?”

“Don’t worry. I’m just not used to the women.”

“Mm.”

I really don’t know what I should say at these moments. If mother was here, she might have said good words of encouragement. It’s unfortunate that she’s not here.

I had nothing I could do for her.

Even if I hugged her, only I would feel better.

“What’s wrong?”

“Eh?”

“You suddenly fell silent.”

“.....I was just wondering where my parents are.”

It’s already been ten years since they started travelling. Mother sells traditional crafts all over the world, and father is working day jobs as the middle-aged couple enjoy their travels. A letter comes every half year, and sometimes they want to know how I am faring.

As I was deep in thought, I felt Sieg’s gaze, so I told her that there was nothing to worry about.

But she did not look satisfied.

“If it does not trouble you too much.....”

“Hm?”

Sieg looked like she was conflicted.

There might not have been any need to pry, but my curiosity won.

“Sieg, what?”

“.....No, nothing.”

“There’s nothing Sieg can do that will trouble me.”

Indeed. I would even gladly receive a roundhouse kick..... probably.

“Then let me say it.”

“Okay.”

“I like this village.”

“!?”

“So I am planning to spend the rest of my life here.”

“Really!?”

“I don’t lie.”

Excited from Sieg’s reply, the stifling feeling I had got blown away instantly.

Regardless of what happens with the marriage contract, Sieg will be here. I felt happy that she will not disappear like my parents.

“You look better.”

“Thank you, Sieg!”

“Did you think I’ll be going anywhere?”

“Well, we are a temporary couple.”

“.....”

Maybe because she was dumbfounded at my excitement, this time Sieg fell silent.

To change the mood, I brought out a special alcohol. However, even that did not help.



And finally, the long-awaited tourist season came.

From what I heard in between work, everyone was talking about what silver ornaments they will buy.

Even the auroras, the objective of the tourists, seemed to have read the mood, appearing every night and entertaining those who were looking up.

Before this busy period came, we managed to finish sowing. Now watering, fertilising and weeding were up to the children.

Then, in an unexpected place, the Sieglinde effect showed up.

“Sieglinde-sama! I’m glad I could meet you!”

“I didn’t expect you to come out all the way here.”

“But of course!”

Sieglinde’s girl fans heard the rumours and came here. On top of that in droves.

Sieg felt sorry that she could not accompany them because of work. She was so busy that she did not have even the leisure to eat with me.

Though I complained about that, I also am spending very busy days.

“My lord! The baby bears sold out, can you do something about it?”

“What, really!? I delivered more just yesterday……”

And the dreaded souvenir shortage happened.

“I’m drying them now, I think they’ll be done by tomorrow.”

“Aa, that’s a relief.”

Even the birch tableware that are rip-offs were almost sold out. Since this wasn’t something that was to be made anytime soon, even the shop lady gave up on them. The wooden baby bears can be completed in half a day if I hurry, and with applying colour and drying the wax it takes about a day to finish. It could be made quicker compared to other traditional crafts.

“I wanted that too.”

“I wonder if it will be replenished soon~. How unfortunate.”

The crimson eagle carving that I modelled after Sieg even received requests from her fans. Even if the tourist season is over, the shop lady will probably put in orders.

“Sieglinde-san’s effect is quite unbelievable, all the villagers are surprised.”

“Somehow, I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s a joyful scream.”

We were standing and talking, but since another lady came in to deliver bracelets, I left the shop. I want to return home and quietly make more baby bears, but there are still many things to do in the village.

Meanwhile, the only restaurant in town looked like they were in distress. I peeked in from the back window, and then sneaked in to help wash the piled up dishes.

“Hey, once you’re done with dishwashing, peel the vegetables!”

“!”

On the table which had used dishes just then, a basket full of vegetables was placed with a thud. It seemed like they didn't even notice that I was an outsider.

Inside the basket, there were root vegetables like potatoes and turnips. Since I they need to be put in water after peeling, I looked for a large bowl but unfortunately they were all in use. Left without a choice, I washed a pot that had burn stains to get a bowl.

Even after that, more work was forced on me. I think they lady might never notice that I am the lord.

Well, everyone's eyes were bloodshot that it was scary, and it was no atmosphere to decline errands or announce that I am the lord.

After the lunch hours, when it was time for the restaurant workers' meals, I managed to sneak out.

As for what the men did, they were butchering reindeers. In this period where hunting is banned, the meat of the season is reindeer meat.

There also people who went to the lake to fish. There are people who dislike the strong taste of reindeer meat, so there is also demand for fish.

There was more work at night. I guided people to the observation platform in the fortress, served warm drinks to keep their bodies warm and sometimes even lent fur clothing to customers who complained that it was cold.

However, work is not over yet. After returning home, I now have to carve more wooden figures.

Having worked like that for a long time, my body now felt shaky.

However, I could not possibly say that out loud so I worked while putting on a facade.



Today, when I was about to go to the restaurant to help again, I was dragged into a narrow alley by someone.

When I looked at who it was, it was someone I knew.

“H-huh?”

“Finally caught you.”

“Sieglinde.....”

Sieglinde leaned against the wall and heaved a sigh.

I wondered when the last time we saw each other was as we faced each other.

“You look unwell.”

“Really?”

Well, I can't deny that my condition is not normal.

Today again, there was bear-san, bear-san, bear-san, and though didn't stay up all night, I did stay up late to work on the wooden carvings. I do think that my young body that has not seen thirty years is screaming in agony.

“Sieg, are you doing alright?”

“Well, it's as you can see.”

Like she said, there was an atmosphere suggesting that she was tired, but her complexion was fine so I was relieved.

We spent the time quietly for a while. Then, remembering something, Sieg handed me something from her pocket.

“What’s this?”

“Chocolate.”

“Where did you get it?”

“I got it from someone I know.”

“Did you have any yet?”

“.....”

What Sieg gave me was a small box containing chocolate.

Contained in a small box that fit on my palms, there weren’t many pieces.

Since I was hungry, I unravelled the ribbons that were wrapped around the box finely. I then took out a piece of chocolate that was beautifully decorated like a jewel and held it in front of Sieg’s mouth.

“Please open your mouth.”

“.....”

Because she obediently complied, I pushed a piece of chocolate into her mouth with my thumb.

Then I also had one for myself.

“Delicious.”

“.....”

“Want one more?”

“.....No.”

“Can I really have this?”

“I got two of the same thing.”

“I see. Thank you.”

Because my brain and mouth weren't working normally, I tried to smile in gratitude but I don't know if I did that well. Sieg was expressionless.

When I asked what her business was, she said that she was worried because she saw me wobbling in the middle of town.

“Don't overexert yourself.”

“Yes.”

“Go to sleep at night.”

“Indeed.”

“We don't need more money, so don't take unnecessary jobs.”

“Got it.”

“Also.....!?”

It realised that I was not at full condition because I was separated from Sieg for too long, and felt my heart healing as we talked.

However, since I thought that this busy period will continue for some time, I thought I would need to stock up for few days. In spite of myself, I was pressing my lips to Sieg's.

I pressed her body against the wall, fixed her in place by holding her cheeks with my hands and was locking my lips with hers as though I coveted them.

My head was empty, I could not think. I could only feel pleasure.

Strangely, there were no people passing by in this narrow alley.

A while later, the bell signalling noon tolled. With that, I separated myself from her.

“Thank you. It really helped a lot.”

“.....”

Since I had to go help the restaurant, I gave her a farewell kiss on her cheek and left the alley.

Then I spent more time working busily. I finally came to when I was exposed to the cold breeze under darkened night sky.

——Huh, wait, what did I just do to Sieg!?

## Chapter 26 - Great Self-Reflection

Having realised my sin, I headed home with heavy footsteps.

Just for days like this, my wife greeted my return on the porch.

“.....Er, erm”

“You’re late.”

“Yes. I, just arrived. I’m sorry it became this late.”

“.....”

This time, even Sieg did not feign ignorance. Her grey eyes pierced me with a denouncing gaze.

She told me to come to the living room since it was cold outside. The water that was being boiled on the fireplace seemed to be done, with the cap rattling.

Sieg brewed some coffee. She put three sugar cubes in and handed it to me.

Sieg’s coffee is the best in the world. Even though I told her my usual impression, she replied, “I see,” with a cold voice as if she were talking to a stranger.

I was afraid that Sieg was going to scold me for the incident at noon, but Sieg did not say anything.

When I stole a glance, she too seemed to be looking at me too so I turned my eyes away.

“Sieglinde.”

“.....”

Nothing came out after that.

Even though it was a meal that we were having together after a long time, we ate in silence. I felt like I would suffocate from the heavy atmosphere.

But since I couldn't let it go like this, I uttered out an excuse.

"Sieg, about that thing during daytime."

Sieg was still ignoring me, but I proceeded anyway.

"I think I behaved weirdly because I did not spend enough time with you."

"....."

If I were to name this phenomenon, it would be 'Sieglinde deficiency'. It occurs from not having enough Sieglinde.

When I said that, she looked dumbfounded.

"How stupid."

"It's as you say."

As Sieg said, it really was a stupid thought. I admitted that.

"I admit that it was done on impulse, but I was not doing it casually."

"....."

Still, one-sided love is only annoying for the partner. I apologised for that.

“Hey, can I tell you something that’s on my mind?”

“Things like that, it’s a problem that you’re keeping it all in.”

“Thank you, Sieg.”

If I stopped here, I would just end up as a flippant man, so I said what was on my mind.

“.....”

“.....”

My heart was quaking like it never did before.

I breathed in and out deeply, and said it.

“Sieglinde-san, please become my true wife.”

“!?”

Ah, should I have said that I love her? No, actually, adding that sounds more flippant.

Regretting it immediately, I simpered. I agonised that it might even be worse than my first proposal.

When I slowly turned my gaze toward Sieg, I found her making a surprised expression.

“Why.....?”

“Sorry, I couldn’t wait until the appointed date.”

The contract was that we will get to know each other well for a year then think about marriage.

Even as I broke our promise, I proposed to her.

I am conscious of the fact that I did it arbitrarily. It's been a few months since Sieg came. I felt sorry that there were times when she couldn't rest properly.

However, she already became an existence that I could not live without.

Just by being separated for a while, I longed for her.

If someone asked what part of her I liked, or how I fell for her, there are so many things, but for some reason I don't think I can reply.

Sieglinde, I really love you. Or so I want to say honestly, but because I was afraid of getting rejected my heart shut itself up tightly.

When I looked at Sieg again, she was making a troubled expression.

It was the face she had when I showed her affection.

“——I”

“Wait, Sieg!”

“!?”

I stopped her, wanting her to reply later.

“Unlike at the ball, I want you to think this thoroughly.”

“.....”

“I still want to spend the rest of the time pleasantly.”

The spring that turned everything green did not come yet.

Neither the refreshing summer nor the short autumn did not come yet.

If possible, I want to spend those seasons pleasantly with Sieg as a temporary couple.

So I wanted her to reply later.

“.....Alright.”

“Thank you, and,”

“Do you still have something?”

“Yes, sorry.”

I asked her to hit me at full force if I did anything she didn't like.

I am trying to be as gentlemanly as possible in front of her, but living with the person I like, there's no telling what might happen. I can't say with confidence that things like today will not happen.

Fortunately, Sieg knows how to protect herself. I predict that it will be very easy for her to beat up a grown man.

“I got that too.”

“Sorry. Thank you.”

“But still, I don't think I'll be raising my fists anytime.”

.....So it's the legs instead of the fists, Sieglinde-san.

Recalling her roundhouse kick, I shivered.

Emmerich, being a soldier, might have been able to reduce the impact from taking a defensive action, but I might never be able to stand up again if I received Sieg's kick.

I decided on that day that I will create the right mood before touching Sieg.



Somehow, we were able to survive the tourist season. Since aurora's have the highest chance of appearing during that period, there are tourists more during that season.

This year, thanks to Sieglinde effect, there were many more tourists so the days were unpredictable.

However, that did not mean guests stopped coming.

And today a special guest visited us.

"Long time no see! Hasn't been that long actually, has it?"

".....Yeah."

"I didn't think you'd be back so soon, I'm happy, Emmerich."

The guest is Sieg's former colleague from the army, Emmerich David.

While we were exchanging letters, a letter that he'll be coming came two weeks ago. The letter telling that he will be arriving today came just yesterday. It was an amazing speed.

I offered him a room in my house, but this time he declined saying that he already booked a place.

And since he had said on his letter that he had something he wanted to talk about, we gathered at my house to talk.

Well, though I'm not sure what it is he wants to talk about.

I thought it was something between men, but he coolly let Sieg sit in.

Emmerich looked nervous as Sieg and I looked at him.

“——So, what is it that you want to talk about?”

“.....”

Since he showed no signs of speaking, I ended up asking him.

Urged to speak, Emmerich started talking slowly in the foreign language.

“What I wanted to talk about is——“

He started off by saying that it was embarrassing to ask over the letter, and ended by saying that he has someone he likes in the village. That was the end.

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

Since Emmerich did not say anything more, silence fell.

“No, isn't it more embarrassing to say it in person?”

Sieg carelessly pointed that out.

Hearing that, Emmerich hung his head down.

He, Emmerich David, looks as though he has a refreshing and friendly personality, but in truth he is gentle and sensitive. Though Sieg, being used to him, can talk casually with him, I can't yet talk to him like that.

From the words before, young man Emmerich became teary-eyed, but I pretended to have not seen it.

To that crestfallen man, it was again Sieg that delivered the final blow.

"I'll tell you this in advance, but the women in this village cannot move out. If you want to fulfill that love, you have to move into this village."

"!?"

Emmerich turned pale with surprise.

"Just who is it that you like."

"....."

"We won't know unless you tell us."

".....White hair, blue eyes."

Sieg looked at me. No, it's not me. I shook my head.

Most of the villagers here, regardless of sex or age, had white hair and blue eyes.

“Tell me more details.”

“.....Braided hair.”

Sieg looked at me again. No no, really, it's not me. I shook my hand in denial.

Most of the villagers braid their hair. It's a part of the Spirit worship.

“Anything else?”

“.....Very cute.”

Sieg looked over here again..... wait what. I told her that I'm not applicable because I'm not cute. To that, Sieg frowned and murmured, “Is that so.”

There was surprisingly little information on the girl Emmerich liked.

“Unfortunately, you'll have to give up.”

“!?”

“.....”

I did have an idea of who Emmerich was looking for, but I wasn't sure whether it was a good idea or a bad idea to tell him.

## Chapter 27 - Aina's Circumstances

Having been rebuked by Sieg, Emmerich's eyes were welling up with even more tears. He was kind of pitiful, so I decided to provide information on that person.

"The person Emmerich likes, I think I know her."

"!?"

After rummaging through my memories, I talked about a girl who came into contact with a foreigner (Emmerich).

"Her name is Aina."

"A-Aina, chan."

"She has a strong personality."

"It's alright."

"....."

Emmerich became assertive the moment I started talking about Aina. It was quite heartwarming.

However, to fulfill his love with her, there are mountains of problems to solve.

"How did you come to like Aina?"

It is a touchy topic, but I have to hear it because it's important. If I don't hear a satisfactory answer I won't help.

I also was thinking that I should listen before I decide anything hastily. However, young man Emmerich started speaking without hesitation unlike his behaviour just moments ago.

“——That day, though there were many villagers, only she came into my sight. The reason was that she had a very sad expression.”

Emmerich said that he saw Aina walking through with a despaired expression, so he was worried. He tried talking to her, but he was strongly spurned.

“Even when I went back to my country, she did not leave my head. Then, I realised that I fell in love with her at first sight.”

He also said that wishes to help her in any way.

“Emmerich, you’ve already heard it from Sieg, but as she explained Aina can’t leave the village.”

“.....”

“If you can promise that you’ll be taking up permanent residence here, I might be able to help.”

“.....”

“Well, it’s not something to be hastily decided on, so take your time.

I also told him that there are other problems.

Even among the villagers, Aina’s family’s hate for foreigners is strong. I told him that there is a possibility for him to be rejected even before he could approach.

“.....Thank goodness.”

“Eh?”

“I wasn’t being hated personally.”

What an enthusiastic man.

However, because that's how Emmerich is, I believe he might be able to save Aina.

I can somewhat imagine what sort of problem she is having, but since I didn't hear it from her own mouth, I can't say it here.

"Alright. I'll try talking to Aina about Emmerich as much as possible during your stay."

"!"

"Ah, don't get your hopes up too much though."

"Don't say that! Thank you so much, really, how can I ever repay you."

"No, no."

Like so, the counselling session for the tormented young man was over.

On his way back, I saw him banging his head into the front door, so I was worried if he could go back safely. However, Sieg said, "He's always a bit like that," telling that it was okay to leave him alone.



Now I acted out my plan to capture Aina.

As I walked through the village, I saw a suspicious figure creeping about. Going from alley to alley with a bow and arrow, it can only look suspicious.

After observing for a while, I took the time no one was around as a chance and approached the girl who left her back undefended.

"Aina, what are you doing?"

"Hii!?"

The girl turned around with a surprised look. After seeing that it was me, her surprise turned into anger.

“W-what! Why are you always suddenly talking to me!? I got surprised!!”

“So~rry”

Apologising evasively, I went straight to the main topic.

“Hey, I want to speak to you about something, can you come to my house?”

“Hm?”

“I want to hear your story, and I want to tell you something.”

“No.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Grandma said to not follow strangers so no way!”

“.....”

A stranger.....

When she was young, I even hugged with her, and taught how to handle reindeer reins, but a stranger. Onii-chan’s hurt.

However, since I couldn’t back down now, I decided to use my last resort.

“Aina, when you climbed trees a long time ago, you broke Horus-san’s precious tree, right?”

“——Wha!?”

“Also, there was this time when you flipped over Mrs Meyer’s basket full of berries, and even ruined the handles, right?”

“Th-that’s.....”

“See, we’re not strangers, are we?”

“.....”

I still have more of her weaknesses. Now, what will she do. When I was about to ask that, the bell signalling noon tolled.

“Eh!? Oh no! It’s this time already!?”

“Hm?”

“L-lunch, I have to make lunch!”

“A-Aina, when will you come?”

“As if, idiot lord!”

“.....”

Even as she said some cheeky things, she ran away all flustered.

My strategy to take advantage of her childhood mistakes was a grand failure.

The next day.

I proceeded on my second plan to call her over.

I won’t make the same mistake this time.

It was evident that she reply to my call from the incident yesterday.

Again, I spotted Aina who was moving about suspiciously.

Then, someone spoke to her.

That person was someone I arranged.

“Hello, you’re here again, ojou-san.”

“!”

A good-looking red-haired fellow blocked her path.

Aina looked surprised as Sieg smiled.

The best angler in the village, Sieglinde was deployed for the success of the plan.

“——Can we talk a bit? At my house.”

“.....Y-yes!!”

I could not accept the results a bit, but the plan to capture Aina succeeded.

I should have asked Sieg from the beginning, or so I thought at this successful fishing expedition.

When Aina was guided to the count’s mansion, she looked surprised. I think she did not know that Sieg was my wife. I couldn’t tell her that it was because she was not interacting much with others.

I was wondering if it would be better for Aina and Sieg to be only on their own, but Aina said, “Stay here if you want?” so I gladly sat with her.

Across from Sieg, Aina sat, and I sat next to her.

“Why are you sitting next to me!”

“Because I want to see my wife’s face.”

“What the heck!? I didn’t want to hear that!!”

And in this state where there was not a shred of tension, we started talking.

First, about Emmerich.

I speculated that he definitely was going to move here. When I asked Sieg about that, she said the same thing, so I proceeded to talk about that.

“We’re here to talk about a man that likes you.”

“No way!”

“No, it’s true.”

Because of things like her house, her personality among many other problems, there were no brave men who said that they want to marry with Aina.

In this village, talks of marriage are exchanged when a woman turns sixteen. Aina, even after her sixteenth birthday, did not get any news of that.

“Aina, do you remember the blond-haired blue-eyed foreigner that spoke to you?”

“Eh? The foreigner that was with the lord some time ago?”

“Yeah.”

“.....Could it be him?”

“Well, yes.”

“No!”

She turned him down so fast that it was almost refreshing. It’s good thing Emmerich isn’t here.

“Aina, we’re not talking about marriage yet.”

“I don’t like foreigners!”

“Aina, Sieglinde is a foreigner too?”

“!”

Aina gasped and apologised to Sieg in a soft voice.

“This is the first time we’re having a proper conversation, isn’t it?”

“.....Yes.”

The two introduced themselves. Aina did join up Sieglinde-ism, but it seems that she never went there.

“I wanted to thank you. About that day..... Thank you. If it weren’t for Sieglinde-san passing by, that day —— I might have died.<sup>14</sup>”

“.....Aa, that was a coincidence, but I’m glad I was able to help.”

As I thought, the person Sieglinde helped was Aina.

Sieg asked the question that was on our minds.

“But, why were you so deep inside the forest?”

“.....”

People who don’t know how to use guns aren’t supposed to go into the deeper parts of the forest. Even still, Aina was just holding a bow and arrows as she wandered deep in the forest.

“Can you tell me the reason?”

---

14 Sorry, last time in chapter 22, I made a stupid mistake and wrote ‘a woman being chased by a girl’ when it should be ‘a boar’. Many thanks to zoom for pointing that out.

“.....”

“I promise that I won’t tell anyone.”

After repeatedly opening and closing her mouth for a while, she started talking.

About the burden she was feeling on her tiny back.

“.....Five years ago, dad died so there aren’t any men in the prime of their life in my house.”

Aina’s grandfather is the best hunter in the village, he is not that young.

Her grandmother, reputed as the strongest xenophobe, has got ill recently.

Her mother too is listless after she lost her husband.

She was being pessimistic about the future.

“If grandpa is gone, we’ll be in big trouble!! So until that day, we need to save up more money  
——!!

“.....”

“.....”

It costs money to buy the raw materials for traditional crafts. However, hunting brings in money without investing much money.

Thus, Aina was going out to the forest to hunt every day.

“.....However, I couldn’t catch anything so far. Grandpa didn’t teach me anything.”

“So that’s how it was.”

“I thought the arrow would hit if the target was bigger. I did reflect on my short-sighted actions.”

“Aina.....”

I thought it was a reckless thing she did, but I had no right to denounce her.

Also, that problem could be solved once she found a marriage partner.

“Aina, about that foreigner, he’s a gentle and sincere man called Emmerich. He’s also good at hunting. Can’t you try considering him?”

“.....”

“He’s one the people I trust in. Please think of him in a positive light.”

“.....”

“Please.”

“Alright. I’ll keep him in a corner of my mind.”

Like so, the fulfilment of Emmerich’s love came closer.

After the talk was over and the tense atmosphere loosened, Sieg cautiously spoke to Aina.

“By the way,”

“What is it?”

“Well, I think Aina-jou is grabbing onto my husband’s hair from a while ago.”

“Eh? Ah, No!”

“.....”

“.....”

Aina, while talking, was playing around with my hair.

Since I knew she was doing it unconsciously, and since she was focused on talking, I did not point it out.

Since there are many ornaments made out of horsetail on the table, she probably thought it was that.

Because the sugar for coffee was in front of Aina, I leaned in for a moment, and when I was going back to my seat my hair was grabbed.

Realising that she was holding onto someone else's hair, Aina flung my braided hair away as if she was touching something dirty.

Really, that's too cruel.

The talk ended up finishing with this topic.

## Chapter 28 - Spring Feast

In the end, we decided against telling Emmerich. After discussing it with Sieg, we felt that he would become strangely vigorous.

Also, we advised him to not come into contact with her, so on the day of his return he left a letter for Aina.

When I took that to her, she refused it on the grounds that it's from a foreigner.

However, when Sieg took it to her, Aina gladly accepted the letter.

As expected.

Few days later.

Aina wrote a letter to Emmerich, and it was sent through Sieg.

Miraculously, the two started exchanging letters.

'I hope they will be closer by the time Emmerich visits this summer,' I thought. I decided to watch over them.

.....Though I'm in no position to cheer for someone else's romance.



The green shade of nature that absorbed the melted snow softly announced that it was spring.

When all the snow on the ground melts, new leaves sprout.

Though in spring we do not hunt, there are still mountains of work.

Today, we are heading to the reindeers' forest.

The reindeer that we've been raising in our barn is moved into the forests from spring to autumn.

"So once it's autumn and it starts snowing, do we start hunting?"

"That's how it is. Autumn is the mating season, so the animals get rough and start breeding."

"I see."

Reindeers breed in autumn, and now is the season of giving birth.

"Reindeers breed with one male having many females."

"That sounds tough."

"Really?"

Because of that behaviour, most male reindeers are neutered. The forest will become dangerous if there are many restless males going into heat.

While we were talking about reindeers, we walked toward the forest.

"Now then, shall I have reindeer-san work a bit more."

Today's objective is reindeer milk. Only during this time of the year are we allowed to milk.

I let the reindeer move freely. If we follow that, a female deer will appear.

Before long, a female reindeer appeared.

I was impressed at how a reindeer is the most popular male in the forest, indeed.

Sieg and I approached the female one with buckets.

“It is docile, right?”

“Yeah.”

If my reindeer is next to it, it becomes docile.

Normally, it has to be held down with ropes to milk it.

“First, we have to check its antlers.”

“So even female reindeers grow antlers.”

“Unusual, eh.”

For reindeers, even females grow antlers. Males shed their antlers in autumn, while females shed theirs in summer.

I heard that it's because females need to secure food earlier in preparation for giving birth and raising babies.

We check the antlers to keep the milking amount uniform.

Just for the milk, reindeers are considered as the village's common property. So any reindeers can be used for milking.

The reason is because it's hard trying to find specific reindeers.

Once we milk one, we have to mark its antler near the ear to show that it has been milked. If there are at least five marks, that reindeer is not to be milked.

“This one looks fine.”

While it was preoccupied with our house’s reindeer, we milked it.

“First, please warm up the teats to make it easier for the milk to come out.”

With the boiled towels we brought from home, we wrapped the reindeer’s teats in them. If the blood flows better, it becomes easier so we have to massage them smoothly.

Even after that, we kept wiping the teats with the boiled towels. This was to sterilise the teats.

After cleaning them, we can finally milk.

“Gently hold the teats with your palm, and using the three fingers from the middle finger apply force downwards.”

Then the milk comes out.

Since the milk came out even if the female reindeer didn’t do anything, the bucket was filled up quickly.

Today, we gathered four bucketfuls. To not let it spill, we put lids on and then brought them back.

“Usually, I would have to gather two bucketfuls, place them on the sleigh, then go milk again~. It’s great that Sieg’s here~.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

As I worked with my wife, we could work faster.

Since we had to boil the reindeer milk to sterilise it, we headed to the outdoor kitchen behind the mansion.

First we start by filtering the milk through a fine cloth to remove any impurities.

After that, it's heated to kill germs.

Though it's possible to directly heat the milk, the milk sticks to the pot so sterilisation is done by putting in a bottle full of reindeer milk in boiling water.

In a bottle that was boiled yesterday, milk is poured in. Then that has to be sterilised in boiling water. Now the milk was potable.

Since they are not preserved, I took a third to Ruruporon for cooking. I took some time and conveyed that she can take half back home.

Good work! is what I want to say, but there is still more work left.

"Sieg, do you have energy for more work."

"So far I'm still fine."

"I'm going to make cheese, can I ask for your help?"

"Alright."

However, it's not made seriously for long-term preservation.

It's a simple one made just from lemon and reindeer milk.

In warm milk, lemon juice is mixed in then it's stirred slowly with a wooden stick. Then, some white stuff will form on the stick.

“The milk is starting to form into curds. It should be alright now.”

After placing a clean cloth over a bowl, the curdy milk is poured into the bowl. Then the solid bits gather on the cloth while the remaining liquid gathers in the bowl.

“Then we just have to get rid of the moisture.”

After squeezing the cloth with a stick until the moisture is gone, the work is complete.

“The stuff in this cloth here is cheese.”

“Hehh, interesting.”

“Right?”

Since this on its own is not tasty, we eat it with salt.

“Truth be told, madam,”

“What is it?”

“I made this from the morning.”

I showed Sieg a basket covered with cloth from on top of the stove.

Inside are biscuits made using a special recipe.

Since I had some time while boiling towels, I made them using rye.

“Amazing.”

“Cheese and biscuit go well together.”

“Indeed.”

The sky is still bright.

But sometimes drinking now is fine too, so we finished work for today.

I told Ruruporon that we didn't need dinner today. Then I rummaged through the food storage, to start a feast, also for eating up the leftover preserved food from the polar nights.

There were fruit wine, smoked meat, liver spread, jam, potatoes, and dried fruits.

Since it was still a little chilly, I lit up the fireplace. Then I boiled hung a kettle over to boil some water.

"Sieg, what about the ingredients for the milk soup? I can go bring the fish we caught yesterday from the cold storage."

"No, let's make it from just the ingredients here."

"Then we'll use smoked meat and potatoes."

I poured in a reindeer stock then put in diced smoked meat and potatoes.

Since I was working as I drank with Sieg, I was becoming sloppy.

"Be careful not to burn yourself."

"Yes."

The liquid from making cheese is put in for flavour.

Actually, this liquid called whey has many nutrients from milk.

Sieg was preparing the biscuits with cheese, spread, dried fruits and jam, using many different combinations. All of them will be delicious.

After the soup is flavoured well with spices, the feast starts.

The fresh and salty cheese went well with the biscuit.

Since we were using fresh milk for the soup, it tasted even better.

“I’m glad I married.”

“!”

I whispered as if I was desperate.

The work never finished this quickly before, and I don’t think I had many occasions where I relaxed like this.

I was working everyday rather listlessly.

It was thanks to Sieg that I changed.

Really, marriage is great.

Sieg, in a rare moment of drunkenness, was drinking as her cheeks were dyed slightly.

I stared at her thinking that it was cute.

“Madam, would you like another drink?”

“Thank you, my dear.”

“!?”

Hearing Sieg’s splendid reply, I poured the wine onto the table not into the glass.

“U-uwah!”

“.....”

Sieg wiped the spilled drink with a dishcloth that was nearby.

“What are you doing.”

“S-sorry.”

I was surprised by drunk Sieg’s words, but I couldn’t possibly say that.

It really is a pathetic story.

Like so, our little feast proceeded merrily.

## Chapter 29 - A Sudden Visit

Today, we strolled the forest —— or so I said but we had things to do.

Now that spring has come to the forest, the snow melted and new leaves sprouted, that everything was covered in bright green.

On such a day, we were out to pick herbs for fragrance and medicine.

The wild grasses are used as spices for cooking or for making products for daily life.

While explaining to Sieg the kinds of herbs to Sieg, we walked through the quiet forest.

When it became around lunchtime, the leather bags was full of many kinds of herbs.

“We should go back soon.”

“Yeah~. Ah, wait.”

I set a fish trap in the river yesterday. Since I wanted to retrieve that, we headed to the river.

The trap is made by weaving together soft-boiled ivy. It's structured so that it's impossible to escape after coming in, and crumbs are placed inside as lure, a very simple thing.

By pulling on the string attached to the stake, I retrieved the trap.

“Ah, there's quite a bit.”

“A big catch.”

In the basket-shaped trap, there were about twenty of these small fish called muikku flopping about. After draining the water, I put in the bag.

After returning home, we took out some of the herbs to dry them in the sun. I put them on wire mesh and then put on a mesh lid to hold them down.

For the rest, we will be processing them with different methods such as heating, grinding and boiling, so we left the rest for later.

I brought the muikku fish over to Ruruporon to ask her to lunch. Of course, since it's impossible to eat it all with just the two of us, I told her it's fine to take the rest back home.

Since we were picking grasses for half the day, our fingertips were dyed red. The colour fades in about three days, but since we are picking herbs everyday, the colour fades just before summer.

“Bit too much, eh?”

“Well, I'm fine with it.”

“Alright. However, we also have to pick berries in summer.”

Berries dye our fingertips in very colourful shades, so our fingertips will ultimately turn into an indescribable shade of colour.

Purple blueberries.

Pink lingonberries.

Red cranberries and yellow raspberries.

There are many berries around this area, and a lot are collected to make sauce, jam and juice.

That berry picking was a part of women's work.

‘Find a wife that can pick berries well,’ they say, showing berry picking is an important work in this area. The midsummer gift supports the table for a whole year.

However, there are also ladies who dislike berry picking. Since sometimes women are called ‘useless’ if they can’t get a satisfactory amount.

Every year, I’ve been going out to pick berries alone.

In summer, while focusing on work, there is a chance to encounter wild beasts, so we need to be cautious.

Berries are also food for wild animals.

As we talked about things like that, it was time for lunch.

Today’s menu is deep fried muikku fish with tartar sauce, boiled potaoes, and a herb-flavoured soup made with reindeer meat and spring turnips.

The muikku fish were gutted properly, and the bitter head was chopped off too. The crispy batter and the light fish went well with the deep sauce that had vegetables in it.

The reindeer meat in the soup was boiled for a long time that taking a bite spread the taste all around inside my mouth. The spring turnips weren’t tough too, and had a subtle sweet flavour.

Today’s meal was great too. I thanked Ruruporon when she came over to retrieve the dishes.

As we were discussing if we should go to the fields to weed, Miruporon came over and pointed at the front door.

“My, a guest?”

Since there aren't many visitors other than merchants and delivery men, I headed for the front door while thinking it was rare.

When I opened the door, there was a familiar face.

"Aina?"

The guest was Aina.

Since she was looking nervous, I wondered if she had something to talk about with Sieg, but she awkwardly gestured behind her as if to say 'guest'.

".....Eh?"

There was someone completely unexpected standing behind Aina.

"G-grandfather!?"

The guest was not Aina but my paternal grandfather.



Was it around the beginning of the polar nights when I told him that I married?

I received a reply telling me to come and introduce Sieg, but I recently gave an evasive answer, saying that it was time for the reindeers to give birth, or that we were busy picking herbs. Though there's also that our marriage is on a tentative contract.

Having an impressive white beard, grandfather glared at me grumpily.

I could somehow imagine what he wants to say.

Then he said the line I had in my mind.

“——Really, since you didn’t accept my request, I came over personally!”

“U-uwaahh, I’m happy.”

“What are you being happy about! Really, after making a frail old man go on a tough trip!”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Grandfather turned 77 this year.

His back is straight, and his complexion is fine. Since he was far from being frail as he said, I felt relieved.

Curious at the commotion at the front door, Sieg came over.

“Ah, grandfather, she is my wife, Sieglinde-san.”

I also introduced my grandfather to her, who looked surprised.

Sieg soon introduced herself and curtsied at a beautiful angle. Grandfather continued to stand there imposingly.

Since here was not a good place, I guided him inside.

He brought two servants along. I saw Miruporon on the way, so I gestured for her to prepare guest rooms. She pounded her chest in confirmation, but I’m not sure if I conveyed that well enough.

The last time I met grandfather was on the night after ball.

The reason why I was able to participate in that ball where I met Sieg was thanks to grandfather’s connections.

My grandfather's name is Adalbert von Lüneburg. He is a marquess in a foreign country.

From a while ago, grandfather kept asking Sieg questions.

“So, you're from Thüringen?”

“Yes.”

“House Wattin is a martial family, were you also a soldier?”

“Yes. I was in the army for eighteen years from when I was thirteen.”

“Ho. Why did you quit and come here?”

“My superior told me to go marry.”

“Is that so.”

Grandfather took a sip of the mulled wine Ruruporn brought, but emptied the glass saying that it was not tasty. When I checked if there weren't other drinks, there was a drink that hurt the insides at intervals, but I decided that I shouldn't bring that out now and placed it deeper inside.

Instead, there was the wine Sieg brought from home so I decided to open that instead.

“Oi, don't pour the contents straight into the glass!”

“Nn?”

When I poured the wine straight into the glass, I drew grandfather's ire for some reason.

When I asked why, it seemed that in old wine bottles there were some crystallised substances floating around. Unless that's removed, the wine does not taste good.

When I thanked grandfather that I learned something, I was scolded that it was common sense. I was also criticised that it was the servant's job to pour drinks.

From then on, he showered Sieg with questions, lectured his shameless grandson, got furious at the fact that father went missing, and was astonished at the fact that mother was dragged into that. There were a wide variety of topics.

He also drank. He drank anyways. When I told him that excessive drinking is bad for his health, he honestly acknowledged it so it was easy to stop him too.

Soon, it became dinnertime and Ruruporon's specially made meals were served.

The meals were served on porcelain dishes with silverwares reserved for guests.

Since Ruruporon diligently polished the silverware, they all shined brightly.

After saying a grace before the meal, he asked if reindeer meat was okay.

To him, Sieg softly told him.

"It's delicious. Very much so."

"Fuumu."

Grandfather stared at Sieg as she ate.

Reindeer meat is rare for foreigners, so this kind of reaction is not rare.

I was about to tell him that he should start eating, but he spoke up first.

".....At first, I thought you brought a big wife, but no, she's a great woman."

He leaned in and whispered so that Sieg won't hear. Then he started staring at Sieg again.

I was at a loss for words, so I too ended up staring at Sieg.

.....Yup, she's a great woman.

Even as grandfather and I sent cheeky gazes, Sieg coolly continued eat, pretending to not have noticed them.

The meal, in a tense atmosphere, somehow ended.

Grandfather said that the strange alcohol was the worst, but also said that the reindeer was not bad.

## Chapter 30 - With Grandfather!

The next morning.

When I went to the living room-cum-dining room, grandfather and Sieg were lively chatting together. From that, I realised that it wasn't a dream that grandfather came.

Grandfather, jolly from chatting with a lovely lady from the morning, said, "Today, should I get guided through the village?" deciding on today's plan. I had many things to do, I could only reply, "Yes, gladly~."

"Ah, grandfather, Sieg can't come with us."

"What did you say!?"

"Today, the women in the village are gathering for dyeing."

"Muu....."

No, even if you puff out your cheeks like that.....

He might not be sober yet. Sieg looked troubled too.

"Erm, grandfather-in-law, I will be back in the evening."

"Well, it can't be helped. I did visit too suddenly this time."

Surprisingly, grandfather coolly accepted it. He seemed to have taken an interest dyeing, so he was listening to that from Sieg.

The women are dyeing linen. These are made from a type of plant growing in the forest called flax.

Flax grows in large numbers just before summer, so we go out to harvest them.

The flowers and the leaves are removed, and only the stalks are placed in a special liquid for a month to get the fibre.

After this step, the stalks are washed then dried. The stalks are then pounded with a stick, the made into threads with a tool that looks like a wooden comb.

Finally, they're spun into completed products with machines.

This year, they're using the linen threads from last year, which the women made in between household chores.

The dyeing materials are also flowers harvested from the forest.

In this season, beautiful purple flowers bloom, so those are boiled down for colour and then used as dye.

Finally, using those threads, they make many products to be sold. Linen products are sold at high prices, but it takes a lot of work for that. It even takes a whole year to make something.

The previous years, I did hard manual labour in exchange for a neighbour lady making some linen for me, but this time I left it to Sieg.

Thus, after having breakfast, my wife went to the village work shed.

"Now then, grandfather, do you want to rest before going out?"

"No, take me outside right now."

"As you wish sir~"

Since both grandfather and I were dressed adequately for going out, we went out as is. The servants followed behind, so it's reassuring in case anything happened.

"Ah, can you wait a moment please?"

"What is it?"

"Since we're going to the reindeers' forest."

After saying that, I went into the hut. Now, the wild animals had babies, so they were at their ferocious stage. Just in case, I have to bring my knife and my gun.

Seeing me armed, grandfather opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“There are bears with cubs. Also, they just woke from hibernation so they will be very hungry too.”

Thought the mysterious white bears don't hibernate, the grey bears do. Mother bears give birth during their hibernation. Then in spring, they go into very savage state to search for food and to raise its cubs.

Their senses dull too, that they sometimes even come near the village for food. Then there's the accidental encounter. Both the bear and the human are like, 'Oh no, to meet at such a place!' but it's usually the human that is killed. Bears with cubs have the strongest fighting ability in the year.

“So, shall we not go to the forest?”

“As if I'd have my schedule deterred by some bear!”

“Grandfather, it's dangerous if you don't look straight ahead as you walk.”

“I know——“

He was talking while looking behind him with great vigour, but when he looked straight ahead, he came to face Teoporon.

However, fortunately, he was off duty, so he was not wearing his working clothes(?) the white bear fur. He was just a half-naked old man (ossan).

If he was wearing his bear fur, grandfather might have fainted from shock. I sighed that it might have been dangerous.

“Who’s he”

“Someone working here.”

“Why isn’t he wearing anything on top.”

“.....Dunno?”

Even as we talked about things like that, I started guiding him around.

First, we headed to the reindeers’ forest. Just in case, I went with three dogs.

“Here past this fence, we put the reindeers out to pasture.....”

I explained to grandfather about the enormous size.

“The important reindeers are nowhere to be seen.”

“They come if you call them.”

We did not go inside the fence. Since it will be a big trouble if he gets stabbed by the antlers.

When I blew the whistle, my white reindeer came. And it even had four female reindeers in tow.

“Ho, quite beautiful. Are white reindeers rare?”

“Well, they are quite rare globally, but in this forest there are quite a bit. Though white deers and bears might be rare.”

He asked as he looked at the fur. I asked him to put up with the fur back since reindeers are sensitive animals. Even though they are domesticated, they are not pets so we can’t touch them freely.

“So they’re different from horses.”

“Yes.”

Since he was satisfied, I let the reindeers go free.

Next, we headed to the fortress protecting the village.

“Fine thing. Was this once an important strategic point?”

“No, it’s just there to avoid harm from beasts.”

“Ha!?”

Since there are no surviving documents about this fortress, I don’t know the details. What I know is that long time ago the damage from beasts were too great that it was made to protect the villagers. Back then, bears and wolves caused the most damage. Nowadays, we can easily exterminate any wolverines and wolves that wander down to the village.

“In addition, it’s rumoured to have been built with funds from the national treasury.”

“So the foolish king back then ordered this to be built. Unbelievable.”

It’s one of the seven mysteries of the village.

Then I guided him through the empty village.

The children are practicing catching reindeers with snares, and the women are busy dyeing.

The men doing variety of things, like making traditional crafts, fishing in the rivers and lakes, or tending the fields.

“This is the only souvenir shop and store in the village.”

Grandfather looked interested, so we went inside.

“Welcome. Oh it’s just my lord.”

“Good morning.”

“Who’s that?”

“My grandfather.”

“Oh my!”

Having passed the busy season, there were no merchandise.

It would work if we turned in handicrafts now and then instead of selling them all at the flea market after the polar nights, but since the flea market was equivalent to a festival that happened once a year, everyone was looking forward to it.

Inside, there were plenty of goods stocked up. The owner lady uses her husbands carriage to buy vegetables and meat from the port. They’re sold at honest prices unlike the visiting rip-off traders.

“Ah, I’d like to buy two chickens.”

“Thanks as always.”

Both of them were hens. I will be raising them for half a year for their eggs. I bought two for Sieg and me.

“The cages are sold separately, want them?”

“No need.”

Since the hens seemed docile, I held them in both my arms by my sides.

Though they weren't anything special, grandfather looked at them strangely.

"When will you eat them?"

"Before winter comes."

Once it starts snowing, it's impossible to raise livestock so it can't be helped.

The chickens bawked about.

Finally, we arrived at the village's landmark.

"What's this."

"The Spirit Shieitii."

"....."

Grandfather stared at the Spirit stone with a quizzical look.

"Do you believe in it?"

"The Spirit?"

"Yeah."

"....."

Still holding up the chickens, I kneeled down on one knee and prayed.

—— I pray that the village will remain peaceful, that my family will be healthy, and that we will be able to continue to enjoy the blessings of nature.

There was no way that I would hear the spirit's reply.

I changed the topic.

“.....Few decades ago, my deceased grandfather suddenly removed the Spirit stone, causing a huge commotion.”

“It seems that your maternal grandfather was an eccentric man.”

“I wonder.....”

The previous lord, Rikhard Salonen Levontret denied Spirit worship and suggested a new way of life.

I slowly began talking about my maternal grandfather.

## Chapter 31 - The History of the Remote Lands

From a long time ago, the nomads of these lands lived by moving with the reindeers.

The reindeers ate sprouts and mushrooms in spring and summer, and ate moss and birch barks in autumn and winter.

Reindeers navigated through nature instinctively.

The nomads spent many ages following those reindeers.

However, that peaceful life was taken away by invaders.

People were threatened into developing mines, and were demanded to pay taxes by many countries that claimed lands. The reindeers were confiscated, and nomadism was banned.

In these dire straits, some even betrayed each other.

From that oppression, the nomads were eventually sent to an extreme land that seemed all but inhabitable.

Having lost everything, they thought up measures to survive.

— Never forgive the outlanders.

— Trust no one but family.

— Treasure children.

The only survivors were those who followed that.

Having survived the extremities, those words came to be believed as the words from ‘the Spirit’.

In these lands where there was nothing, the Spirit was a pillar of support for the people.

Faith keeps people happy.

The Spirit leads people to affluence.

Over time, people started calling the Spirit Siedi, and enshrined a stone as something that the Spirit dwelt in.

Like so, the sedentary life began.

In a life not leading a nomadic life, people lived with the Spirit.

When a child is born, people give thanks to the Spirit, and when a person falls ill, people pray to the Spirit.

Singing spirit songs (joik) was told to be a method to communicate with the Spirit.

Over the ages, the Spirit worship strengthened, but at the same time the people were dying out.

After centuries of sedentary life, one day, an incurable disease spread through the village.

The reason was unknown. From elderly people, children, and women, weaker people started collapsing.

Prayers did not help.

When there were sick people in the village, they drank reindeer blood, but even that did not help.

Amid that, the lord who just lost his wife made up his mind to carry out reforms.

That man was my grandfather, Rikhard Salonen Levontret.

What he did first and foremost was to demolish the spirit stone.

The Spirit gave nothing. Believing that, grandfather hid the symbol away to stop the worship.

Of course, there was strong opposition, but in that time of crisis resistance did not last long.

Then for a while, they entered a stagnant period.

They lived only with the reindeers and the Spirit, so no one knew what to do.

What changed that situation was a foreign adventurer.

The visitor concluded that medicine was needed to combat the disease.

The foreigner was not a doctor, but he was a scholar of considerable learning, able to speak many languages, travelling around the world.

The man's name is Lukas von Lüneburg.

Thanks to his numerous advices, the land of the pursued ones started changing.

That saviour that rescued the village was my father.

Having heard of medicine, grandfather sold reindeers to call over a doctor to distribute medicine. What was once thought to be an incurable disease gradually faded.

From there on, grandfather wished for more knowledge. Father's teachings were general knowledge, but to the former nomads that knew nothing but reindeers and hunting, they were revolutionary.

By getting crops from working the soil, there were less children suffering from illness. Also, people found out that the foxfires (auroras) in the sky are valuable to foreigners, so the tourist business started. People learned of things other than reindeers. The Spirit faded out of people's mind, and lifestyle changed.

Of course, there were those who did not accept the changes, but they were a minority.

Year after year, life got better. Now that people had more peace of mind, they started remembering their old faith in the Spirit.

However, grandfather did not tolerate that.

Thus, a rift grew between the ruling nobles and the villagers.

Even after grandfather passed away, that scar remained.

"Did you put this stone back?"

"....."

This was all I could do, I thought as I nodded weakly to grandfather's question.

Placing the stone back in place from the Count's mansion was the first thing I did when I became the lord. The villagers criticised that it was just blarney, but many felt relieved at the change.

"You, unlike your stubborn grandfather, are not a lord that pushes for reforms."

"....."

Well, people should be free.

There's no way that it was okay to force faith, happiness, and lifestyle onto people. People are the masters of their own destiny, and I believe that it is arbitrary for an authority to block that path.

“.....However, it might just be that I don’t know what it means to be a lord well enough.”

“.....”

“I’ve been protecting the village for a decade now, but nowadays I’m not sure what is good or bad.”

After I started living with Sieg, my horizon got broader.

However, I did not yet reach an answer.

In front of Siedi, there were offerings again today. The villagers show thanks to the Spirit through offerings.

“The Spirit, it would be nice if it did exist.”

“.....”

Mother taught me about the Spirit. Thanks to that, my thoughts are not one-sided.

“I see. That’s why my idiot son ran away.”

“I wonder about that.”

Father’s motive for leaving the village is a mystery.

He once said that it was cold here, and he also once said that he needed materials for research.

Mother followed him because she was worried about his soft personality. However, mother is even more benign than father. The two being able to travel for a decade might just as well be included as one of the seven mysteries of the world.

“Really, to abandon the duties of a lord to his only son and playing around, how disgraceful!”

“Well, there isn’t anything special so it’s fine.”

The duties of a lord doesn't involve anything fancy. It's just scribbling on paper at night.

When I stood up to return home, something happened.

"Ah."

"What's wrong?"

One of the chickens I was holding started tightly contracting its body.

"Grandfather, what should I do....."

"Ha?"

"I-It's coming out."

"What was that?"

I was holding up the two chickens.

In that state, one is daringly attempting to lay an egg.

The chicken's butt is pointed to the outside. At this rate, the egg will fall and crack.

"Erm, if it doesn't trouble you too much, can you get the egg please?"

"W-Where does it come out from!?"

"The butthole."

"....."

"It's the hen on the right."

"....."

Grandfather superbly caught the egg.

“Why do I have to do this.....”

“Sorry about that. It was a great help.”

The bell signalling noon tolled, so we decided to go back home.



After returning home, we had a meal. I left grandfather to Miruporon while I cleaned the dilapidated chicken coop and processed the herbs from yesterday.

While sighing, grandfather told me to take a break so I went back inside to rest.

“Is it like this everyday?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re working too much.”

Even though he says that, I only worked for three hours after coming home. I was doing work at a rather leisurely pace.

“Rather than a noble, you’re more like a villager.”

“Well, I don’t really live elegantly.”

The title was bestowed to force us to live in the remote regions, and the heirloom we received from the king is just the aurora on the night sky. We’re an unfortunate bunch of nobles.

So we have to make do.

“This is just a what if, but,”

“Yes?”

“What will you do if I told you to come live in the country that your father grew up in?”

“I wonder about that.”

Father’s homeland is also where Sieg grew up in.

It’s much better for living than over here, and Sieg too won’t have to face difficulties adjusting to the culture and lifestyle here.

However, I don’t know how to live abroad, and most importantly I am the lord. I can’t abandon this land.

I avoided answering grandfather’s question with a soft laugh.

Because I answered a serious question half-heartedly, grandfather got cross.

A while later, Sieg came back home.

Grandfather quickly stopped sulking, so I whole-heartedly thanked the descent of the goddess with two hands together in my head.

## Chapter 32 – Fish

The third day of grandfather's stay here.

This morning, he said that he wanted to try wearing traditional clothing so I lent him mine. Fortunately, our height was similar so it fit well enough.

"Then, see you later."

"Have a safe trip. Sieg, please take care of grandfather."

"Alright."

The two of them are going out fishing today.

Grandfather apparently went out fishing on his holidays, so he was excited to go someplace new.

The two of them took Teoporon as their bodyguard and went to the river in the forest.

Now that there isn't anyone else home, I started working.

First, I fed the chickens. The feed is mixture of herbs from the forest and dried grains. While the chickens were absorbed in the food, I cleaned the coop. Once I replace the hay with new ones and refill clean water, it's done.

When I was about to go back, a chicken, having just finished breakfast, laid an egg. Thanking that, I retrieved it after wiping it with a clean cloth.

They don't always lay their eggs in the morning. I heard that it takes a day and an hour for an egg to form. It goes slightly off everyday, so it's not laid at the same time every occasion. The other chicken would lay its egg around noon.

Since that was over now, I headed to the forest with Miruporon. It was to chop down trees for firewood.

I also collected as much branches as possible and put them on the sleigh. Once I found a suitable tree, I hacked at it with an axe and knocked it over.

The fallen tree is sawed into sizes small enough to place on the sleigh. After that, back home, I started working to remove the barks. The barks, after being boiled with herbs for both durability and softness, are also used for making baskets.

“Then, Miruporon, please take care of chopping firewood.”

The valiant girl pounded her chest in reply.

In addition, the firewood chopped today will be used in winter. Trees contain a lot of moisture, so they have to be dried for at least half a year.

Because of that, the firewood for use in the cold seasons are gathered from late winter to early spring.

The next task involved working at the outdoor kitchen.

The ingredients are potatoes that had sprouted. They were prepared beforehand to be used this time.

I started off by cutting off the sprouts and peeling the skin off. There was quite an amount so I ended up taking quite a while. The ones that were done first started changing colour, but I continued on regardless.

Then, I cracked in the two eggs that were laid today and yesterday, and mixed flour, salt, honey, and reindeer milk in that.

White flour is expensive, but I bought it since it would be nice for a change. There was soft bread after a long time on the breakfast table too. However, Sieg and grandfather's country also

apparently enjoyed rye bread<sup>15</sup>, so he ate the soft bread with a disappointed look. I felt apologetic for that.

I greased a shallow and wide pan and fried the batter on it. I could fry three at once at most.

Like so, small glutinous pancakes are made.

When I finished, there was a mountain of pancakes. Just in case, I tasted one. It was smaller than my palm, so I could eat it in two bites.

The fried surface was crispy, while the inside was chewy, or more like fleshy. I think I might have failed in controlling the amount of flour.

The subtle sweet and savoury flavour of the potato mixed well, so it could be eaten anytime. Of course, it's possible to have a meal with just these and coffee, but I wanted to try sandwiching something in between.

What I was going to cook now was salmon (lohi) that a merchant brought this morning.

First, after removing the scales with the back of the knife, the surface is washed with clean water. The head is cut off, then it is gutted by slicing its belly open. After cleaning the blood off again, I sliced it in two with a knife starting from where its head was.

Finally, I removed the bones in the middle.

I then removed the skin from the salmon that was chopped into two pieces. That was then seasoned with spices and salt. Then the chopped salmon pieces were dipped into the batter from before, which was thinned with water, and deep fried adequately.

On top of the pancake I just made, I placed thinly sliced cheese, vegetables and deep-fried salmon and put Ruruporon's special tartar sauce. The finished products are wrapped in paper and put in a basket.

When I went to the kitchen, Ruruporon was pouring coffee into bottles. She also handed me Teoporon's lunchbox. He's getting lunch made by his beloved wife.

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15 Sorry, I've been translating 黒麥 incorrectly the whole time. While it translates literally as 'black barley', it means 'rye'. I'll get to fixing everything sometime.

With everyone's lunch, I headed to the river.

The forest grew rich in colour, ready for summer. Today, there was a light breeze, creating a pleasant sound of leaves.

After going down a pathless route for a while, I arrived at the river. Faraway, I could hear voices that had energy uncharacteristic of fishing. When I arrived at an open space after working through the grass, a fish flew and fell in front of me.

"Th-This is.....!?"

"What, it's just Ritzhard."

"Ah, grandfather."

A short distance away, there was grandfather, who was wearing white bear fur for some reason, and Sieg. The two were in a posture for staring into the river.

"What happened here."

"It didn't bite for so long, so that bear man jumped into the river."

Grandfather pulled up a net from the river. In there, there were some freshwater fish.

While we were chatting, Teoporon came out of the river. Then he threw the fish he caught with his harpoon to the riverbank. The caught fish landed nicely on the ground. He showed some great throwing skills.

"Ohh....."

"That man is absurd."

I can't help but agree.

I talked to Teoporon, and then decided to have lunch.

He wrung out his wet clothes and left it to dry on a big rock. As for the important parts, he hid them with bear fur.

“That man, isn’t he a little too vulnerable!?”

“.....”

“.....”

Without minding about the people around him, he silently started eating his lunch prepared by his wife. The fur was tied sloppily, so he was worried that it might be seen from specific angles.

I spread out a sheet on the grass, and sat at an angle that hid Teoporon’s front before having lunch.

When I opened the basket, grandfather glanced at the wrapped bread.

“What’s this.”

“Potato pancake with fried salmon.”

“Hoh.”

Grandfather opened the paper wrapping and stared inside with a quizzical look. Since it wasn’t long since I made it, it’s still warm.

After seeing Sieg eat it, he too started eating. He got some tartar sauce on his mouth, so I passed a napkin to him.

“Fumu. Not bad.”

“Glad to hear that.”

Sieg looked like she wanted ask something, so I asked her what it was.

“No, I was wondering if Ritz made this.”

When I said yes, she murmured, “As I thought.”

“So you cooked this!”

Hearing Sieg’s question, he too was surprised.

“Quite skillful.”

He said as he pressed for another one.

The meal I made with more effort satisfied my grandfather’s taste buds too. I also shared some with Teoporon who was sitting behind me. The honourable man tried to stand up and pound his chest, but the fur that was tied at his waist became loose so it became hard for him to work.

After lunch, we returned home. Since Teoporon gestured for me to have the caught fish, I gladly accepted.

I removed the head and the insides and split them into two. I took three to the kitchen, and for the rest I salted and laid them outside in a mesh box to dry.

Dinner was food made with the fish that was caught today, lentils, and a soup of smoked wild boar meat.

We had another busy dinner today.

## Chapter 33 - Gramps, Returning Home.

Grandfather is returning to his country tomorrow. So dinner today was the last.

After dinner, the three of us were spending a nice time, but then grandfather said before, "I want to have a talk with you."

I could only get bad vibes from that. Because he asked if we were getting along well. He probably wants to hear the detailed story.

He might notice that we are a temporary couple because we do not have a sweet mood like newlyweds.

It was a nice time after our meal, but since grandfather looks sleepy I should speak up now.

"Ah, Sieg."

"What."

"Grandfather wants to talk to me a little bit, just the two of us."

Sieg tersely replied yes and curtsied to grandfather that she'll be resting first.

At this rate, the fact that we are a temporary couple will be found out. Panicking, I did something that I normally would not do.

I stood up and escorted Sieg to the door while holding her hand.

Then I bid her good night.

"Sieg, sweet dreams."

"!?"

Then I gently hugged her and kissed her on the cheek. I felt relieved that we would be believed as a real couple now.

When I looked at Sieg to apologise for that sudden action, which was to fool grandfather, for some reason she was blushing.

“——Eh!? Ah, s-sorry!!”

“.....”

She curtsied to grandfather once more and sped out of the living room with quick footsteps.

Before, even if I kissed her on the cheek, she just kept a straight face, yet today she blushed.

“Oi!”

“.....”

“Look at me you idiot!”

“.....Yes.”

Hanging my head down, I turned towards grandfather.

“Why is a fully grown adult blushing like that!!”

“.....No, Sieg is always like that.”

“I’m talking about you!”

“!?”

What does he mean. I couldn’t imagine that I was the one blushing from embarrassment. I deeply repented that I should not attempt anything out of the ordinary.

“You know the story.”

“Yes.”

“I did not even have to pry.”

“.....”

The fact that I was in a temporary relationship was found out almost refreshingly.

I regretted that I should have regularly done good night kisses at least. However, it's too late now.

In the end, I told grandfather the whole thing.

“I see, so this marriage was an attractive proposition for her as well.”

“.....Yes.”

“Really, what are you doing.”

“I have nothing to say.”

However, unlike Sieg, I was serious about it. Even if she asked that we break up after a year, I don't think I'll want to marry any other woman.

“To think that a head of a house, a count no less, is not trying to carry on his lineage!”

“But, I can't imagine getting anyone else as a wife.”

In addition, for the couples from this village, the birth rate is very low. There is a high possibility that children will not be born even if we wanted them.

“You have foreign blood mixed in you. It's too early to give up.”

“.....”

Still, we are but a temporary couple. We can't rashly make children.

"For now, she said that she'll be living here even after the tentative contract is over."

"Ha!?"

"Eh?"

"Realise it already!!"

"?"

".....No, it's fine."

Grandfather gave me tips to not make my wife run away.

"First and foremost, keep trying to win her heart over."

"Eh?"

"Not 'Eh?! Do you really think that your feelings will get across even if you don't say anything?"

"No, that's,"

I don't want Sieg to be troubled. That was restricting physical contact with her.

"You're not getting closer because you keep refraining."

"But still, isn't it unpleasant to hear stuff like that from someone she doesn't consider to be of much importance?"

"Then act as a poor and pitiful man."

"Why's that?"

Grandfather explained. Women are weak to emotions.

If a woman discovers that a poor creature can't live without her, she'll definitely stay with him.

“That’s how it is, got that?”

“Yes! Surely!”

Also, I was to never forget gratitude. I was to remember anniversaries like birthdays, and give gifts. He gave me various tips on wooing women.

He said that it’s not enough to just act as a poor and pitiful man.

“That thing before was fine too. That was rather good.”

“.....”

It was embarrassing to just imagine it. Why did I do such a thing in front of others.

“Anyhow, if you keep refraining, she’ll be gone in a blink!”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m going to sleep now!!”

“Good night.”

Like so, grandfather’s interrogation ended.

I was worried if I could return to my normal life with Sieg.



Grandfather’s boat back home was scheduled early, so we had to part even before the sun rose.

“Grandfather, this, Ruruporon made it for you.”

Ruruporon prepared food that could be eaten on the boat. I handed it over to the servants so that everyone can eat it.

“Ritzhard, thanks for taking care of me.”

“No no, I haven’t done anything that fancy.”

“Sieglinde-san, I’d like to ask you to take care of my immodest grandson.”

.....Grandfather, he’s troubling Sieg again.

When I was about to say something adequate to relieve the situation, Sieg spoke up.

“Yes, don’t worry, grandfather-in-law.”

My heart was caught by Sieg’s words that seemed to promise the future. She’s the ‘Crimson Eagle’ indeed. She clutches people’s hearts with her claws and never lets them go.

“Ritzhard, I’ll be coming again!”

“Uwa, I’m happy.”

“.....”

Grandfather scowled once and went his way.

I wanted to at least accompany him to the village front gate, but he rejected the offer.

Thus, the guest that came like a storm went back to his country.

“.....”

“.....”

Also, the temporary couple life with Sieg resumed.

“Shall we go inside.”

“Aa.”

Though it's almost summer, mornings are still cold, especially before sunrise. Today, it was cold enough to light the fireplace.

My breath quickly turned white and then disappeared. Having confirmed the chill with my eyes, I decided to go back inside.



When we went to the living room, Miruporon was already lighting the fireplace. Even my frozen heart seemed to melt.

Sieg went to the kitchen and brought out a kettle. Then she brought out two kuksas from the shelf and took out the can that had coffee beans.

It seemed that she was going to brew coffee.

Then, without talking, we spent the time staring at the fireplace.

Only the sound of burning firewood and the vibration of the metal lid reverberated throughout the room.

Now that the water was boiling, Sieg stood up to fetch the kettle. Since the handle is hot, she used a thick cloth glove to grab it.

When I tried to help her before, I was scolded not to because it was dangerous, so this time I obediently watched her brew coffee.

It's Sieg's hobby to grind the roasted coffee beans and brew the drink through a filter.

In the wooden cup, there was sugar and milk as well.

Sieg had remembered the taste.

When I enjoyed the scent and took a sip, I could only think that it was the best coffee in the world.

"Delicious."

"I see."

We made our usual exchange and then fell silent again.

When I emptied my cup, Sieg offered to brew another cup.

"Please."

I was really thirsty for some reason. Since I drank it all without taking the time to enjoy the taste, I gladly accepted her offer.

Sieg poured more coffee.

I liked watching her make coffee.

However, I am not in any situation to enjoy that leisure.

I have to explain about that thing yesterday, and I have to execute grandfather's tips.

Sieg will be here even after our tentative contract. I thought that it was good enough to stay as good friends.

That won't do.

I'll definitely regret it.

As I received coffee from Sieg, I mustered up my courage.

## Chapter 34 - The Abrupt Change of the Yeti of the Borderlands

I fixed my posture and my expression.

I then decided to explain about that hug and kiss yesterday.

“Hey, Sieg.”

“What’s wrong? You’re suddenly being so polite.”

“No, about that yesterday.

“.....”

When I brought that topic up, Sieg frowned. Maybe I shouldn’t have said it.

However, I already said it, so I can’t act as if I didn’t say it. I continued talking.

“Truth be told, grandfather was suspicious of our relationship so I did that to look like a real couple.”

“.....So, that was why.”

“I really am sorry for doing that without talking about it to you in advance.”

“.....”

I bowed down to Sieg.

For some reason, I felt as though a heavy pressure was pressing down so I could not lift my head.

“Lift up your head.”

“.....”

“Now.”

“Yes.”

I obeyed her command and lifted my head up.

Her face returned to the usual imposing face from an intimidating expression.

“.....”

“.....”

Extremely awkward.

Really, it wasn't an atmosphere to talk nor touch.

.....Strange. It was so warm when we were drinking coffee.

Thinking that, I smiled softly at Sieg.

Smiling to avoid troublesome situations was a bad habit that did not go away though I was already turning thirty.

I predict that I'll be like this for the rest of my life.

“.....So?”

“Yes?”

“What did my grandfather-in-law say?”

“That we did not look like a married couple without a doubt.”

“I thought so.”

The maneuver was a sudden idea and an act of impulse. It was the worst possible one, not even taking the time to discuss the plan with Sieg.

“I'm sorry I didn't cooperate well.”

“No, we were found because I was blushing red.”

“Really?”

“It’s true.”

“How did that happen?”

“Because Sieg was cute.”

“Ha!?”

“Because Sieg was cu—“

“Stop, you don’t have to say it twice. I can hear you!”

“S-Sorry.”

“.....”

Indeed. I blushed because of Sieg’s embarrassed reaction that was unexpected.

“So?”

“Grandfather is, you know, going to pretend to have noticed that. “

“That’s a relief. If my parents and my cousins hear of that it will be bothersome.”

“Yeah.”

“.....”

There was no longer a shard of a sweet mood.

Sieg crossed her arms in thought and frowned once again. This time, her eyes were sharp too.

Because of that, the atmosphere here became heavy, like that of a council of war in a losing country.

And those who planned strategies for this endless battle were the young supreme commander and a useless subordinate.

“Sieg, the temporary couple might have been impo—“

“Wait, I’ve got an idea.”

“Eh?”

Having changed her expression to that of a commander from that of the Thinker, Sieg announced the plan.

——Then, we just have to act like real couples all the time so that we won’t be found out.

“I believe that the cause of the failure lies in me.”

“That’s not—“

“No, it is. If I didn’t get flustered we would have looked like a married couple.”

“.....”

I wonder about that.

Even if that ridiculous plan did succeed, I don’t think I’d have been able to escape grandfather’s interrogation. However, since I would be scolded if I said anything unnecessary, so I silently listened to my wife’s words.

“We lack the normal closeness that a couple has.”

“.....Well, that’s true.”

It’s been half a year since we lived together.

We’ve gotten quite close, but I can’t deny that it still feels like ‘a nice lady and kid who admires her’.

There, Sieg suggested that we act close to disguise ourselves as a real couple.

“So what are the plan’s details?”

“.....”

I do think that it is a good plan, but I don’t know what chummy couples do. Sieg too shut her mouth.

My parents were just being ‘Howa~’ with each other, and didn’t specially touch each other that much.

Just in case, I asked my superior.

“Hey, Sieg, what are the things that you think a close couple will do?”

“That’s.....”

She became the Thinker again.

Well, maybe parents with children don’t act lovey dovey in front of their children.

One would probably be able to see who are really intimate couples just from the atmosphere.

It was already impossible for us.

Sieg’s parents too didn’t seem do anything special, that Sieg froze up.

“Sieg, nothing?”

“.....Aa, nothing. I wonder how my parents’ relation was like.”

“.....”

No, they had ten children, aren't really affectionate?

Though it wasn't something that I should point out.

"How were Ritz's parents?"

"....."

Our parents that always went 'poyayan' did only roundabout things, so unfortunately it won't help.

As I was thinking that, I suddenly had an idea.

If I say what I want here, won't she forgive my actions since it's to disguise ourselves as a real couple?

"I won't force you if you don't want to."

"No, it's fine."

——Right. My parents were so passionate that it was almost unsightly.

They always stuck together, and when they had to part, they would kiss and become sad.

They would always hold hands, and give lap pillows.

I told Sieg my wild delusions.

"I see. Your parents are very close."

"Well, yeah."

She became the Thinker for the third time today. Since I lied, I secretly repented.

“Alright.”

“!?”

“Let’s try it as much as possible.”

“Really!?”

“Aa. I don’t lie.”

What should I do!! I deceived Sieg. This was underhanded, but I’m happy!!

I should buy a chair quickly.

Unfortunately, there are only single-person chairs in my house. I can’t have my lap pillows with those.

“What’s wrong.”

“N-No, nothing.”

I felt worried that I might be grinning, so I quickly hid my mouth with my hand.

“I think it will be hard to everything, but it would be nice to get used to it slowly.”

“.....Yeah.”

Really, truly, thank you very much!! Or so I wanted to say but I suppressed it.

Oh no. Only I came to benefit from this plan.

I felt a little guilty, so I checked one more time.

“Sieg, are you really okay with this?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, there might be some unpleasant things, no?”

“.....”

I was worried that when we play at being a real couple she might kick me with all her might one day.

She won't be able to hold back, I predicted.

Kicked away, ruined in both body and mind, beyond recovery. I could vividly imagine myself becoming like that.

“Well, you can answer after giving it more thought.”

“No, there are no problems.”

“Pardon?”

“There's nothing troubling.”

“.....”

This onee-san, she should know my feelings for her, so shouldn't she know what kind of mishaps I might inflict on her?

One last time, I asked Sieg.

“Sieg, are you really okay with this?”

“I'm telling you that I am.”

“You promise to not run away?”

“You're persistent. As if I would run away.”

“Then, can I kiss you?”

“!?”

Her grey eyes opened wide.

I got her word. I won't allow her to take it back.

I turned towards her and asked her to stand up. There's a table in between us, so as we are now I can't do anything.

I thought she might resist, but she obediently stood up.

I took her hand and sat her at the chair by the window.

I held her cheeks with both my hands and lifted her head up towards me. Then, I kissed her bewitching red hair.

Then, I moved her bangs over to one side and kissed her forehead. Then I moved on to her eyelids, her cheeks, and right next to her lips, touching her lips slightly sometimes.

Surprisingly, Sieg was being docile.

Though her eyelids were closed, her eyelashes were quivering faintly. Her hands were clenched on her knees, showing that she was nervous.

"Erm, I don't think married couples do this in pub.....!?"

Having sensed that it was strange, Sieg tried to say something, but I sealed her mouth before she could say anything more.

Am I going to get kicked in the stomach!? Or so I worried for a moment, but I shifted my focus back on kissing.

Satisfied, I stretched my body. Then, I felt a gaze somewhere so I tilted my head.

The gaze came from the window.

“——!?”

That thing tapped the window appealing its existence even more.

From that sudden encounter, I ended up crying out.

“——Bear!!”

.....No, well, it was Teoporon.

## Chapter 35 - Bear ❄️ Drop-Shipped

A white bear's head was poking out. I couldn't see Teoporon himself.

The first floor is built higher than usual. The snow might block the way out, so stairs are built first.

Same for the windows, they're built higher so that they won't be smashed by the heavy snow.

When I opened the window, Teoporon was there.

Because of the house's structure, it seemed that he did not see inside.

When I asked him what it was, Teoporon pointed to the ground.

“——A bear!?”

A real one this time.

He hunted a bear.

“Sieg, look at that.”

“.....What”

It's been a long time since I saw a caught bear. A brown bear tied to a sleigh. It looks like a young adult bear.

I jumped out from the window, but a tingling pain shot up my foot. To Sieg who was looking out the window, I crossed my hands over my head while crouching to show her that it was dangerous to jump out from the window.

Sieg went around and came out from the front door.

“Are you okay.”

“Yup, I’m fine.”

After checking my health, our eyes focused on the brown lump.

The bear in the front yard was incredible.

“Teoporon, what’s this?”

“A present for the great king.”

“.....Y-ye~ah.”

As usual, I couldn’t understand him. I laughed it off.

Sieg too shook her head.

“I was mistaken. I thought that she was a warrior. I heard from my wife. Warrior Sieglinde, no, queen of the great king should I say.....”

Teoporon was declaring something with great vigour today. As Sieg and I nodded, he continued.

“I wanted to hunt a white bear, but I could only find a brown one. However, this one is good. You can see that from the fur. Now, please accept this!”

Teoporon pointed to the bear, then to us. That meant that he’s giving it to me.

“Eh!?”

I pointed to the bear then to myself. 'You're giving it to me?' it meant. Teoporon nodded.

"W, wa~. I'm happy!"

Teoporon hunted the bear as a gift.

He pounded his chest and bowed.

"Ah, wait, wait!"

I stopped Teoporon who was about to go with his white bear fur.

"Sorry, but help us with processing it! I can't do it with just the two of us!"

A bear is as big as an average adult male. Since it would take a long time to butcher this I asked for his help.



Since the bear was too big to move to the hut, we did it at the front yard.

"Iyaa, I didn't imagine that he'd give a bear."

"You look happy."

"I wanted to let Sieg try some."

"Is it really that tasty?"

"It's great."

It's been five years since I had bear meat. That meat was from the white bear Teoporon was wearing.

"Plus it's a young female."

"....."

This is the second best season for bear meat.

Having just awoken from hibernation, the famished bears go on a binge. Thus, their meat thickens and their fat becomes tasty.

By the way, the tastiest season is in autumn just before it goes to hibernate. Here, nature's abundant blessings make the bear meat even better.

I knew that Sieg was looking at me strangely, but this excitement did not go away.

"By the way, you don't hunt bears?"

"We don't. Never."

Bear hunting is dangerous so no one in the village dares to..... except for Teoporon.

Safety first. Thinking about the taste and quality comes after that.

As for the bigger animals like deers and boars, our ancestors learned how to deal with them through trial and error.

However, for bears, no matter how many centuries passed, they are still very threatening so we don't hunt them for their meat.

Fundamentally, our life is focused on surviving as much as possible in this harsh environment.

Therefore, we don't risk our lives for hunting.

The bear that was caught had barely any scratches.

It appeared that the bear died by a spear through its heart. Teoporon is still very reckless.

Its throat was already slit open, so I think he drained the blood already.

I brought out knives.

First, we had to skin it.

Before the fur is bathed in medicinal water, we can't touch it with our bare hands. Because there are bugs and things like that.

I put on leather gloves and started skinning it.

Bear fur is warm, and merchants buy it at high prices. Since the value falls if it's damaged with a knife, I did the skinning carefully.

We cleanly skinned it off from the bottom to the head, and carefully collected the oil from the fur too.

Then, we removed the subcutaneous fat.

I heard that if it's carefully processed in hot water many times, panacea is made.

Bear oil is said to be good for abrasions, burns, and for boils from bug bites. I never used it before, so I don't know if it's true though.

Now that we trimmed off the fat, we then disembowelled it by slashing it open from the chest to the belly.

Bear organs are used for medicine, so these are also traded at high prices. To not spoil it, I put it in a sack full of ice.

Then we butchered it up by its parts. Since the bones are hard, we carved the meat off fully.

Some time later, the butchering was finished.

The bear, now reduced to chunks of meat, is then matured for a month. It's big, so it takes longer.

Bear meat is mostly fat. The meat is red, but it turns black after maturing it. The meat doesn't become that soft though. Depending on how it's cooked, it can become hard like rubber.

If it's cooked well after maturing, it's top grade. The fat becomes soft from the heat, and it melts on one's tongue.

"Teoporon, thanks!"

He even helped with moving the meat.

I'm looking forward to eating the meat a month later.

Though I'm already spent from butchering the bear this morning, this was just the beginning of work today. I have to work.

Around noon, the two of us were drooping.

".....Oh no. My energy is spent from butchering the bear this morning."

I had an elbow on the table as I had my head resting on the table. Sieg too looked exhausted. She was staring vacantly at a spot on the table.

"Let's do something we can do indoors in the afternoon."

“Okay.”

One can really feel the limits of one’s stamina in spring.

The bear is a formidable enemy, indeed.



A few days passed since grandfather returned home and we had that battle with the bear.

We still worked from morning to evening.

Then, a letter arrived. It was from grandfather.

His recent events were written on it, and he also wrote that he wanted to see auroras sometime soon. Finally, it said, ‘I’ll give you a marriage present, so write down what you want.’

However, I didn’t have a specific wish so I replied, ‘I don’t need anything as long as grandfather is healthy.’

A reply arrived soon.

‘That wasn’t what I wanted to hear!’ I received a reply full of his rage.

And it also said that he’ll just give me a huge bear statue and a part of the vast marquess’s land. Both are troubling gifts.

But then I remembered that there was something I wanted to get.

When I wrote that down, it soon arrived.

What I wanted as my marriage present was a cushioned chair.

The furniture sold in this village are all made from wood, so there are no soft furnitures.

I thought that I wanted a soft chair like the one I saw in the marquess's mansion.

I installed the long chair where there were two single chairs.

That place is the best place to take a nap.

“Why a chair?”

“To get a lap pillow.”

“.....”

Sieg glanced over here and then sat on the chair.

She looked at me again and tapped her lap.

“Eh, really!?”

“I'll say this beforehand. My thighs don't feel that good. I train, so my muscles are hard.”

“Is that so? Well, I won't know unless I try it out.”

I decided to lie down on her lap before she could change her mind.

Sieg said that it will be uncomfortable, but her thighs were not too soft nor too hard, but just perfect.

Sieglinde-san, thank you very much. These are really good thighs.

## Chapter 36 - Aina and Emmerich

Today the women in the village are making linen. Sieg too went out early to help.

Meanwhile, I am going to gather the kids in the village and weed the farming fields. Since the women can't take time to care for the children, I volunteered for it.

Since I told them to gather at the Spirit stone, I headed there.

"Ah, my lord~ Good morning~"

"Good, mor, ning!"

"Morning."

There are seven children in total. They are children from the age of 5 to 8, who can't help in making linen.

However, there was one child that stood out. What's this big one doing.....

".....Erm, why are you here, Aina?"

"Mum went to make linen."

"I-I see."

The feeling of disharmony came from Aina who was sixteen years old.

She said that she was told by her mother to go to the fields.

Aina's mother, I wonder if she got healthier. I heard that she couldn't even move her body well after losing her husband.

"But honestly, I am grateful. I did think that I'd like another person to do this with."

"It's not like I came for you."

“Yeahyeah.”

Though she acted coldly, she went along while holding a small child’s hand. She seemed to be quite friendly with them, since they followed her quite well.

I also talked to the other children, and then started moving to the fields.

.....But then, I was called out to on the way.

“My lord, can you take my child too?”

The lady who approached had a toddler that just started walking. The toddler won’t be able to help in farming.

“S-Sorry, both parents are sick.”

“Haa, is that so.”

On busy days like these, the people at home are supposed to look after the children.

However, if both of them are not feeling well, they can’t help but leave it to someone else.

“Alright. Please prepare three towels, two kuksas and a cloth for carrying the child on my back.”

“Thank you!”

I held the child as I waited for her to bring the requested goods.

This child here was gentle, and did not cry even with a stranger like me held him. When I lifted him up high, he giggled happily.

While carrying the child on my back, I headed to the fields.

On the way, Teoporon met up with us. As soon as they saw the big man with the bear hat, the children approached. The aloof white bear warrior was unexpectedly popular with children.

When I passed through the fortress's corridor, I got an energetic greeting from the reception desk.

"Good morning, my lord!!"

".....Morning."

Strangely, the soldiers at the fortress were in very good shape these days.

There were idling away on alcohol, but recently I can't smell alcohol on them. Also, they do their guard duties diligently, and their behaviour is like a proper soldier.

About two months ago, a new captain came here after getting demoted. Maybe it might be thanks to him, but I don't know.

I passed through while tilting my head in wonder.

"Have a safe trip, my lord!!"

"I'm just going to the fields."

"To take work into your hands, you're incredible, sir!"

"....."

This might be the right behaviour, but since I knew how depraved they were, it felt out of place.

Well, it's a good thing. I decided to leave it alone.

"Tell the lookout to alert us if any beasts approach."

"Yes, sir, gladly——!"

"....."

The receptionist swiftly stood up and showed me a neat salute.

Outside the fortress, a vast expanse of fields unfolded before us.

The villagers take turns doing work. The vegetables that were planted during the thawing season were growing well. Although we can't any great harvests since the soil isn't good here.

Used to doing this, the children moved in between the furrows and picked out unnecessary plants at a great rate.

I told them to advance while collecting the weed in a basket. The collected weed will be dried and used as fertiliser for the next year.

Since I was taking care of a toddler, I, well, didn't work. It's dangerous to take one's eyes off children this age, so my eyes were always on the child.

Left without many choices, I just strolled around the area and blew grass whistles to pass time.

Around noon, Ruruporon and Miruporon brought lunch.

I gathered everyone and made them wash their hands at the pond.

"My lord~ is it clean now?"

"Ah, there's still dirt under our nails. One more time."

"Yes~"

I properly checked if their hands were clean. Since it would make children sick if they ate with dirty hands, I inspected them strictly.

Ruruporon prepared meatball in cream soup and rye bread.

The meatballs were brought in a large pot, an abundant amount. The children got their portion in their own kuksas that they brought from home.

Since rye bread was too heavy for a toddler, I put it in the soup and waited for it to soften. He looked hungry, almost looking as if he wanted to fall into the bowl. “A bit, wait a little bit~” I said as I waited for the bread to soften.

“My lord, did you eat yet?”

As I fed the toddler, Aina came over.

“No, not yet.”

“I’ll take over for you, go eat.”

“How about you, Aina?”

“I ate already.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

I passed the bowl and the spoon to her and sat the toddler on my lap next to Aina. Then I went and got my portion of meatballs and bread.

Having finished his meal, the toddler started dosing, so I carried him on my back and tied him tightly with a cloth.

I was waiting for this moment.

I resolved to work hard in the afternoon.

“Ah, Aina.”

“What.”

“A letter arrived from Emmerich.”

“W-Whaddya say!?”

Because the toddler might awake from sudden loud noises, I warned Aina.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner.”

“I forgot.”

“.....”

“Sorry, I didn’t think that you were looking forward to Emmerich’s letters that much.”

“H-Haa!? As if I looked forward to those!”

“.....”

Aina and Emmerich are exchanging letters in secret. Those letters are delivered through my house.

Though the rate was a bit strange, with Emmerich sending three while Aina wrote only one.

“That person, he’s really strange.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, really. Once, he picked a flower and pressed it into a bookmark and sent it to me.”

I wonder who it was that came asking for the name of that pressed flower?

Of course, it was a foreign one, so I had no way of knowing.

Rather, I remember getting an indescribable feeling from imagining Emmerich squatting down and picking flowers or pressing flowers.

As to why a relatively affluent man is giving such gifts, it’s the result of my advice that gifts that aren’t too expensive are better. Who could have imagined that he would give things that did not cost a penny.

It wasn’t only the pressed flower bookmark that Emmerich sent.

“He even sent a letter on some thick paper with a picture.”

I think I saw her seriously eyeing the picture of the beautiful white castle, but maybe that person just resembled her.

Postcards are rare here, but in other countries it's quite common. I, too, when I first saw it being sold as a souvenir, I remember going 'heh~' in awe.

“What's more, he even sent a shellfish he picked up on the beach, you know!?”

On Aina's wrist, there was a bracelet made from rose pink shellfish. She made it from his gift. She definitely seemed to like it.

Whatever she said, it seemed that they liked each other, so I ended up feeling delighted.

Realising that I was being smug, Aina acted dishonestly as if to hide her feelings.

“He's really strange!”

“I~ see~”

“!?”

Though she said that Emmerich is strange, to others, it doesn't sound like that.

When I replied light-heartedly to her, I was glared at.

“By the way, he said that he's coming over soon. Wasn't that written on your letter?”

“Haa!? What's that!?”

“Eh, no?”

“.....”

“Aina?”

“Letter!!”

“Alright.”

Because I had cloth around me from carrying a toddler, it took a little time to reach the inner pocket.

In front of me, Aina was being visibly impatient.

“.....”

“What does it say?”

“It says that a dog he’s raising at home gave birth.”

“.....”

Emmerich, how disappointing.

I ended up getting worried about their future. It was a very disappointing story of such a day.

## Chapter 37 - A Disappointing Girl and a Disappointing Young Man.

Surprisingly, Emmerich came earlier than expected.

The season can still be called spring. There is still freshness in the green shade of nature.

I went out to the village entrance to receive our guest.

Meeting again after few months, the young man, still looking refreshing, quietly and shyly greeted me. Inhibited as always.

“Will you take it slowly this time?”

“No, I’m returning tomorrow evening.”

“Eh, that short!?”

“In this period, we’re busy with the joint military exercises.”

“I see.”

I heard that he was spending hectic days in his country. Apparently, the shellfish and the flower that he gave to Aina are from the exercise facility.

Also, Emmerich decided that he will live here.

“When I said I’m retiring from the army, I was coerced into helping with work.”

“What a pity, that.....”

His holiday this time was hard-earned, at the cost of not getting a single holiday in summer. In winter, he’s busy undergoing the various processes for retirement, so the next time he’s coming will be in spring next year.

“Right then, let’s go meet up with Aina.”

“.....”

Emmerich nodded with a jubilant expression on his face.

While we were talking, I spotted a familiar back.

“A-Aina.”

“!”

Emmerich’s beloved happened to be there ahead of us.

Called out to, Aina turned around. Upon seeing me, she looked annoyed, but when she saw Emmerich, she looked restless.

“Emmerich came over to see you, Aina.”

“!”

Aina looked surprised and stared at Emmerich. When her eyes met his, she turned away out of embarrassment.

Emmerich was just smiling delightedly. To that young man, I nudged him.

“.....Erm”

“!”

“Aina-chan.”

She didn’t imagine that the quiet man would speak out. Aina gaped at him.

Meanwhile, since nothing was said after “Aina-chan,” her tension seemed to have got loose, and she said something unexpected.

“——Don’t get so friendly with me!!”

“.....”

“.....”

The person who used abusive language, Aina looked the most surprised, for some mysterious reason.

The girl, maybe unable to stand it anymore, ran away in silence.

“Erm, Emmerich?”

I was worried about Emmerich, but he had — a serene expression.

What a relief. He didn’t mind her words.



First, I told Emmerich to stay home quietly. I decided to go get Aina by myself.

The girl I was looking for was shopping at the caravan that had set up stall in the village square.

“Aina.”

“!”

When I talked to her from behind, she flinched a bit and dropped some things from her leather bag.

“Ah, sorry.”

I picked up the vegetables that rolled out and put them back in the back.

She was still frozen from when I called her, so I talked to her again.

“Emmerich’s not here.”

“What!? You should’ve said that earlier!”

Aina looked around with great vigour. It seems that she didn’t imagine that Emmerich wouldn’t be here.

“Do you have some time.”

“I’m busy.”

“Don’t say that.”

I picked up her bag and headed towards her house.

“Hey, give it back!”

“I’ll escort you home, princess.”

“Who are you calling princess!”

At this hour, the scary grandfather isn’t there too. Her grandmother is ailing, so she won’t come out either. Thinking that, I decided to carry Aina’s load until she got home.

“There’s a lot. Celebrating something today?”

In the other bag, there was a chicken. It was clucking with great vigour.

“No. Grandma and mum’s not feeling too well, so grandpa told me to make some soup with blood.”

“.....I see.”

Behind Aina’s house, there was an empty pot, another pot of water on the stove and a knife prepared. It seemed that not much time passed, since the water wasn’t even starting to boil yet.

“The chicken, want me to process it?”

“.....”

She didn’t respond, but I proceeded anyway.

After knocking the chicken unconscious, I tied its legs with a string. Then I slit the area around its arteries and drained its blood. The pot filled up with the chicken’s blood.

“Aina, we’re having a luncheon in our house tomorrow, won’t you come?”

“Eh?”

“Though I say luncheon, there’s only Sieg, me, Emmerich and Aina, the four of us.”

“.....”

Aina’s expression darkened.

So it’s no good even with Sieg. I dropped my shoulders.

“.....go.”

“Eh?”

“I’m busy, so I can’t go.”

“Yeah. Alright.”

Aina's grandmother and mother are sick.

She might be doing all the housework alone.

The water started boiling, so I retrieved the pot and waited for the chicken's blood to drain. Once the blood stopped dripping, I put the chicken in the water and boiled it for a few dozen seconds. After that, I put it in cold water and then plucked the feathers. For the delicate parts, I removed the feathers by searing them off with a hot metal rod.

"Aina, then, how about a tea party?"

"What's that?"

"Emmerich gave us some delicious coffee and confectionaries. Why don't we have that with the four of us?"

"If it's coffee, it's not a tea party."

"Then, a banquet?"

No, a banquet's different.

I pointed out my own mistake in my head.

"Just a bit's fine."

"....."

Maybe it was because I persisted well. Aina eventually agreed to come.

The next day.

The tea party that we arranged for the young foreign man the village girl was, well, unfortunately, a failure.

It was good sitting Emmerich and Aina across from each other, but their eyes never met, nor did they say anything.

Like so, with his only conversation ending with Aina's one-sided declaration of "Don't get so friendly with me," Emmerich went home.

It was a teary parting from me feeling sorry for him.

The day after that, Aina came over in the morning.

"Huh, what is it?"

"....."

Aina had a basket in her hand. Though it was covered with a cloth, I could see some biscuits inside.

"These are....."

"Could they be for Emmerich?"

"....."

After hesitating for a while, she nodded.

——Uwa, what should I do?

I forgot to tell Aina that he was staying only for a night.

With a half-smile, I received the basket.

After she confirmed that I took it, Aina turned around to return, so I grabbed her arm and dragged her inside.

“Hey, Ritz, what are you doing!”

“Sorry!”

“Let go! I’m busy, I don’t have time to see that person!!”

“No, Aina, sorry! Emmerich’s already gone!”

“.....Eh?”

“He returned home yesterday evening.”

“You’re lying!”

“I’m not lying. Sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“.....”

I took her to the living room and sat her at the chair next to the window.

“.....Emmerich is busy, so he could only stay for a night.”

“I didn’t know. It wasn’t written on the letter.”

“.....”

I didn’t know what I should say. Time passed without us saying anything.

Since it was awkward, I brought up a topic.

“Ah, right, he said that he’ll be moving here.”

“Who is?”

“.....Emmerich.”

“I didn’t hear that.”

At her growling voice, I almost let out a yelp.

Rather, Emmerich. Why do you never tell Aina important things.

I felt annoyed at the foreign soldier.

Seeing Aina's face, this time I really did let out a short yelp, "Hi!"

She had an enraged face like no other.

"Aina, Emmerich didn't mean any ill, he's just being considerate....."

"It's not that. I'm angry at myself."

"?"

Aina said with a trembling voice.

She wanted to thank him for the pressed flower bookmark, and wanted to ask where the castle in the postcard was. She wanted to show him the shellfish bracelet she made, and had many other things she wanted to talk about.

The two were getting to know each other through letters.

However, it's different to actually to talk in person and communicate through words.

When they actually meet each other, they become shy that they don't know what to do.

"Aina, Emmerich will come again."

"But I said something so harsh, I need to apologise."

"Don't worry. Emmerich doesn't mind."

"....."

"He's coming back in spring."

"!?"

Because the day of their reunion was so far away, Aina started crying.

“Uwa, Aina, wait!”

At that moment when tears started trickling down her cheeks, the door opened.

“.....This is,”

The person who came in was Sieglinde who just returned from her morning stroll.

Seeing her, Aina ran into Sieg’s chest.

“.....!?”

While embracing Aina, she asked with her eyes what was up.

I immediately shook my head and denied any accusation.

Sieg continued to pat Aina’s back, waiting for her to calm down.

I too furtively approached them.

Aina was crying like a child.

I knew her well from when she was young. She’s probably the most violent kid in the village.

As she grew up, she became pessimistic about the future. However, as she exchanged letters with a young man, she found love and a way to save herself.

In her tough daily life, those letters may have been her only joy.

Aina was crying because she was regretting that she couldn’t act as she wanted.

I felt sorry for her, felt pity for her. Various feelings welled up. It's pathetic, but I too became teary-eyed.

When I looked at Sieg, she gently embraced with her free hand.

Sieglinde, what a benign woman.

Embraced by Sieg, Aina and I slowly calmed down.

The problem of Emmerich and Aina looked to be far from getting solved.

The biggest problem was not Aina being unable to act true to her own feelings. It was her grandfather and grandmother who did not like foreigners.

## Chapter 38 - Hermann Artonen's Activity Report.

Spring has greeted our lands.

That was what was written on the letter from the lord. The snow in the city had melted, so I had thought that the place I would be assigned to was getting warm too.

However, the port I arrived in still had some snow and the blowing wind was one that had a biting cold.

What part of this is spring! I retorted to the lord that I had not seen yet in my head.

Just in case, I opened the letter of appointment and checked where I was going to.

—— To Hermann Artonen.

We inform that you are hereby appointed as the fortress captain of the County of Revontulet, Lappland. You are to start working from the first phase of spring.

When I asked a sailor nearby where this was, he told me that we were in the County of Revontulet.

This was definitely the place.

I gave up and paid money to a merchant travelling to the village to get there.

Not far away from the Arctics, this place was famous as a place of exile for those who caused trouble within the military.

It's a simple job of patrolling and keeping watch for any beasts that may harm people, but there are no records of the village, protected by thick, tall walls, receiving damage from beasts. Because there is the fortress in the village, I don't think that there is any need for a garrison to be stationed, but there is also the story that back then the king and his mistress from the village agreed to station troops in the area.

Rather than that, I cursed my ill luck.

I came here because my superior's corruption was pinned onto me.

One is a noble, and one is a commoner. It's clear who would win if both deny the act.

It was a fruitless life, I thought.

After spending those years chased by work, even losing my chance at marriage, I was turning 55 this year, going into my sunset years.

Now, I was going to the remotes lands where extreme cold dominated.

My term in office was not set, and the soldiers there are a ragtag group of troublemakers.

My life too was soon about to end anyway, or so I almost gave up.

Not a long time later, I arrived at the village.

The rumoured fortress was impressive. One could hardly imagine that it was for this village of only a few hundred people.

I heard that this fortress was built a few centuries ago when the king's favourite mistress, who was from this village, worried about the damage her people received from beasts. This military facility felt very out of place in this village surrounded by the forest.

When I got off the wagon, there was someone standing by the fortress gates.

A young man, who had white hair braided down to his waist, wearing traditional clothing of bright blue and red.

He had a soft atmosphere to him.

That appearance did not fit with the bleak fortress walls.

Indeed. He was like a fairy. He felt fantastical, out of this world.

“Hermann Artonen-dono, right?”

“!”

From his words, I confirmed that he was a being of this world.

And this man was the ruler of these lands, Count Revontulet.

I never thought that anyone would greet me, so I was very surprised and felt appreciative that the lord himself came out to greet me.

However, he was a kind person, giving me a guide through the fortress facilities such as my room, the dining hall and the training facilities.

Finally, we visited the staff lounge where the soldiers were on standby.

The lord looked apologetic as he said that I shouldn't expect much and opened the door.

“.....”

“.....”

I did have a bad feeling even before the doors were opened, but it was much worse.

There were two soldiers glaring at each other, about burst out at each other.

There were soldiers jeering and egging those two on.

One was asleep, with a bottle in his hand.

Bad work behaviour, and they were ignoring the lord and me.

I unconsciously stared up at the ceiling in disbelief.

Without waiting for anything, the fistfight started. The surroundings heated up. The drunk man woke up.

It was pandemonium.

“Hey, stop that!”

Recklessly, the lord went in to stop them. However, they did not stop.

“——!?”

While the two were wrestling each other, the lord was hit on the cheek by one the men’s elbow. Because there was quite a lot of force, he collapsed on the floor.

“M-My lord!?”

Because the lord who intervened to stop the fight was knocked away, the soldiers who were fighting looked agitated. The spell was broken and the fight quickly stopped.

The lord quickly stood back up, while saying that he was okay, but the large bleeding wound on his cheekbones looked pitiful.

Even then, the lord was not enraged, and merely told them off with a warning. He then proceeded to introduce me and give words of encouragement before leaving.

The soldiers were mocking him as the sissy lord, but I couldn’t really accept that.

The next day.

The soldiers were already drinking in the morning and started the day off with vulgar jokes.

Of course, they didn’t even notice that I, their boss, came to work. Unable to do anything, I decided to just be at the reception desk.

I sort of expected it, but everything here done carelessly.

On the reception desk, the pot of ink of was empty. There wasn't even a pen.

Sighing, I started organising the documents.

While I was working, a person came from the village. It was still dark, so when I peeked out, it was a rather tall woman.

She named herself as 'Sieglinde Salonen Revontulet'. No need to say, she's the wife of the lord.

She asked me to take her to the soldier's lounge, but there are only poorly disciplined soldiers inside. It's no place for a woman to go into.

However, the countess visited this place sometimes, and apparently it wasn't something special today.

Because she insisted, I relented and guided her in.

Though they did not react much to my appearance, they reacted greatly to the countess.

While crude jokes flew about, the countess took their drinks and properly scolded.

"Oi oi, what's this. If it isn't the lady, here to do her usual meddling again!"

"Heheh, she's probably here for revenge."

"What did you say?"

"Huuhh, you didn't here~? Your weak husband got hit here."

"!?"

Upon hearing that, the countess expression changed into a menacing look. Her glare was fierce, and had a sharpness resembling that of a carnivore.

“Oi, Ars, it was you, right?”

“Aa, I didn’t he’d collapse from just that.”

“So you did do it on purpose.”

“Haha! As I thought the lord didn’t tell her beloved wife!”

“Of course he wouldn’t, getting injured by trying to stop us fighting, it’s shameful!”

The countess stopped cleaning the room and glared at the soldiers.

I wanted to tell her to go back, but even I could feel her rage that words did not escape my throat.

“What’s up with those eyes.”

“Wanna go at it!?”

I shouted at them to not lay a hand on women, but as expected I was ignored.

The lady too did not look as though she was going to let that statement go.

Then, for some reason, the countess beckoned them to come over, provoking them.

“M-My lady!”

Easily provoked, the soldiers charged at her.

I shut my eyelids tight to prevent myself from witnessing the worst possible event.

-Blam- The sound of a punch connecting echoed in the room along with a scream. There was also a dull sound of something hitting the wall, but more importantly the scream was a low one, from a man.

When I cautiously opened my eyes, the countess was in a battle stance, bouncing about as she prepared to face her second opponent.

I heard that one stepped like that to raise one's physical abilities.

I was relieved that it was not the countess that was hurt, but she was about to attack her second opponent.

“Ah, S-Stop”

As I was saying that feebly, two shadows moved simultaneously.

The countess swung out first. The soldier deftly avoided the uppercut and then tried to hit her fist away with his elbow, but he received a blow to his knee and collapsed.

The knee is one of the weak points of the human body, and it's weak to blows from the side. She understood that well. The first punch was a feint to approach closer.

Still enraged, the soldiers lunged at the countess, but being the unfortunate drunkards they were, they could not win.

The countess's countenance then returned to normal and she continued to clean the room as if nothing happened.

For the soldiers that were collapsed on the floor, she kicked them away into a corner as she cleaned.

After throwing away all the alcohol in the room out the window, the countess left with a cold expression.

The soldiers moaned in the corner, looking humiliated.

The next morning, the countess came again.

This time, not drunk, the soldiers were in proper condition.

I told them all to stop but no one listened.

Today, the soldiers are not drunk. I tried to stop them saying that it would be bad if anything happened to the lord's wife, but one of the soldiers restrained me.

However, I was worrying unduly.

The countess won again.

The soldiers, feeling even more vexed, started training.

A few days late, the countess came over and fought, and the results were the same.

The soldiers, who used to be drunk and unmotivated, asked me, their captain, how to become stronger.

I could teach them the basic theories of martial arts, but applying it to practice was a different story.

Truth be told, I did not have a good physical ability, so I only did paperwork in the military.

As we continued to train, the countess came over to see the situation.

The soldiers did not become agitated at once. I bowed my head down and asked if she could teach us the basics of martial arts.

The magnanimous countess granted our wish.

From then on, the countess came over everyday and taught the soldiers how to fight.

One day, the village women who admired her came over and brought some snacks. The soldiers did not seem to dislike that either. Thanks to those snacks, there eventually no soldiers who rebelled against the countess.

After a month, a few talented soldiers became better than the countess.

From there on, those people taught the other soldiers how to fight.

The countess stopped coming to the fortress after that.

However, the women continued to bring over snacks, and the soldiers were putting their back into training.

In a blink, the disorderly soldiers became diligent soldiers.

“For some reason, everyone’s gotten more diligent now.”

“I-Is that so?”

“Yeah. Strange~”

While watching the soldiers, the lord tilted his head.

I felt relieved that his bruised cheek had recovered fully.

I was told to not tell how the soldiers improved by the countess so I couldn’t tell him.

The lord too left without prying into it.

This remote land is an interesting place.

It's a far and fantastical place where people who look like fairies live, where there was a kind-hearted lord and a friendly lady.

I took a liking to this place.

I couldn't help but feel that there will be good things in the future.

## Chapter 39 - Berry Picking

70% of this country is covered with forests, that people live silently as a part of nature.

When the world is no longer in the silver shade of winter, the soft breeze gently caresses one's cheeks and brings forth a warm world of green.

Once it's summer, the women of the village are busy picking berries. Everyone brings big baskets and goes out to pick those precious berries.

There is an abundance of berries in the forest. It is said that there are dozens of different species of berries.

Today, I roved through the forest with Sieg. We first arrived at a place that had purple berries.

"This is famous, so you know this one, right?"

"Blueberries, huh."

"Yup."

Of the world-famous berries, three kinds are in our forest.

Blueberry shrubs are a little shorter than where our knees are. They are thriving on the ground. So it's a little hard trying to pick them while squatting down.

"Now then, let's start!"

"Alright."

We started picking berries.

We only picked the ripe ones. Unlike other fruits, berries do not ripen even after they are picked. We have to wait for unripe ones to become ripe on the tree. So we have to take care when picking the berries.

It's possible to tell if a blueberry is ripe or not by checking the stalk. If it's purple, then it's ripe. If it's red, it's not yet ripe.

Unripe blueberries are acrid, bitter and sour so they're not fit for eating. People who don't know when it's supposed to be harvested sometimes think that blueberries are supposed to taste like that.

The fully ripe ones are really sweet and tasty. How the blueberry easily comes off is also a sign that it's ripe.

About thirty minutes later, a basket was filled.

When I stood up and stretched, I felt fatigued. There's still a lot more to do, but I was already like this. I looked at Sieg as I massaged my back, but she looked composed.

".....Berry picker, I should have bought them this year."

"There are things like that?"

"Ah, you don't have that over there."

I picked berries every year, but I remembered that other countries didn't have this.

The berry picker is a fantastic tool, which is used by raking the plant to pick off the berries. Though it picks off unripe berries too, so it's not all that good thought.

"Now then, shall we continue on?"

I picked up the good full of berries and walked on.

While walking through the forest, we have to be careful of our surroundings. If we are in the territory of carnivorous animals like bears, lynxes and wolverines, we have to leave immediately. I walked on while checking the scratch marks on tree barks and animal tracks.

“There aren’t many lynxes (ilves) now. I can’t find any of them now.”

“Ilves?”

“There were poachers overhunting large cats, so in my grandfather’s generation they moved the army and put stricter regulations on.”

Since they’re not extinct, I can sometimes see some tracks of lynxes.

I saw the real thing a few times when I was young. They’re very wary, so they don’t come out when there’s people holding guns. However, because they’re carnivorous animals, I am wary of them. There’s no telling what they might do if they’re hungry.

“Rather than the lynxes, wolverines are most dangerous.”

Wolverines are omnivorous animals of the weasel family. They’re very fierce, so we at the village are very wary of them. They have sharp claws and fangs, in addition to a very strong jaw.

It sometimes even attempts to hunt larger animals when it gets desperate, so they’re dangerous.

While we were talking about those things, we arrived at the place where our next berries grew.

There were semi-transparent red berries on a shrub that reached up to our waist.

“These are redcurrants.”

“The ones that are used for the sauce.”

“Indeed.”

Redcurrants taste sour. They’re usually used for making sauce on meat. They’re boiled and preserved, or made into jams to please our taste buds.

Again, we picked them in silence.

They were small, so it was tough filling up a basket.

“Ah, right! I have something I want to show you.”

“?”

I was feeling tired, but when I thought of that I suddenly felt much better. I grabbed Sieg’s hand and went further into the forest.

“——This is”

“Amazing, right?”

At the clearing there were blooming white flowers. Also called ‘star of the forest’, the seven pointy petals are characteristic of this flower.

The flower itself is small, and the leaves are more noticeable, but they’re lovely flowers. I remember mother getting very pleased when I picked those and brought them to her.

Sieg sat down and watched the flower. I too laid down the baskets and lied down on the grass.

“It’s a fragile flower.”

Sieg seemed to like it, nodding to herself.

While keeping my wife in my line of sight, I looked around.

I could see plentiful greenery in the birch trees. It was vastly different from the frozen scenery of winter.

It was also a season where all the plants of nature glistened from the sunlight. Here people called the forest from summer to autumn 'green gold'. The blessings of nature are a national treasure.

“——So, it is my favourite season.”

Picking berries and mushrooms in the forests, fishing in the river. Preparing the farms for winter, and eating meat. There are only special days.

During the white nights, when the sun does not set, I get very excited. It's very different compared to the depressing polar nights.

Like this, the relaxing summer days pass smoothly every day.

“Winter's hectic, what with all the hunting and the polar night.”

“But I like winter too.”

“Yeah?”

Sieg sat down next to me.

She then talked about the winter.

The ever stretching vast white plains felt otherworldly, and the crisp air felt good.

The morning of the polar night, when everything was shrouded in blue was breathtakingly beautiful.

The blue foxfires (auroras) at night beckoned one to a mystical world.

After saying that, Sieg lied down and looked at my face.

“I love”

“!?”

“the blue and white world of winter here”

“.....”

.....Why are you saying that to my face!?

From Sieg's words, my heart beat so fast yet it was disappointed so quickly, that I felt both heaven and hell.

“When I look at Ritz, I relive that memory very much.”

“We were always together.”

“Ah, maybe that's why.”

When she was travelling through the endless snowy plains, when she saw the foxfires in the morning, I was always there. It could be that my presence there was swept away by the scenery.

“My favourite colours are white and blue.”

“Eh?”

“You asked before, right? My favourite colour.”

I didn't think that a question that I asked months ago would be answered back now.

I see, so Sieg likes white and blue, huh?

That moment when I learned of Sieg's preferences, the sky turned strange.

It was perfectly clear just then. I almost want to complain.

“Let's start going back soon. Looks like it will start raining.”

“Alright.”

While carrying the baskets full of berries, we came out of the forest with quick footsteps.

After getting home, I gave some blueberries to Ruruporon and asked her to bake some snacks with those.

Around lunchtime, the raindrops started falling.

While listening to the rain, I sat in the office and did some simple work involving signing documents. Sieg too was doing something of her own.

As we were spending this peaceful afternoon, Ruruporon brought snacks.

“Uwa, looks great!”

She made a special blueberry pie.

Called ‘mustikkapiirakka’ in our language, this confectionary has sour cream, sugar, eggs and blueberries mixed as the filling.

The outside is crispy, and the inside is soft. The sweet flavour of blueberry adds a nice touch to the whole thing.

Though I usually don’t ask for confectionary, this time I specially asked Ruruporon because Sieg was here. But because it was much better than I had expected, I too felt very satisfied.

Such was the story of a satisfying afternoon.





## Chapter 40 - The Ins and Outs of Crafting

Recently, I decided with Sieg that we will make the bear fur we got from Teoporon into a gift for grandfather.

Grandfather liked Teoporon's white bear fur very much. Teoporon too realised that and took his off, but grandfather refused, saying, "I don't want something that was used to cover your groin!" Of course that was grandfather's condition, but I wanted to retort if he didn't have a better way to word it.

After we skinned it and removed the fat from the surface, we put it in a medicinal concoction of salt, tree barks and leaves to remove the bugs and the smell. The water was changed many times, and at the same time we rinsed and cleaned the fur.

After repeating that process, we let it out to dry in the wind for a few hours. Then we placed on the worktable and removed any remaining bits of meat.

Then we smeared ground volcanic rocks and salt all over the fur and left for a few days. After that, the powders are brushed off, and bear oil is applied before we moved on to the drying process.

For the drying process, the fur is hung inside the house on the wall. If we don't do this, the fur curls up after getting dried, making it hard to craft something out of it.

After it's dried, we then brush the surface to make it soft. It seems that long ago people crushed animal brains on the fur and chewed them with their teeth to soften the fur, but I don't think I could endure such a process.

When that's done, we went onto crafting it so that it could be worn on the head.

Teoporon used the same method people use when they stuff animals, so the skull is still there. However, I don't know how to do that so I just sewed in the skull afterwards.

On the clean bear skull, I drilled in some holes in it.

The bones were tough, so it was a tough job.

Once I finished drilling holes, Sieg fitted the fur on the skull. In the eye sockets, I set black quartz, which were lying around in father's room.

On the paws too, I drilled some holes for the claws. For that too, Sieg carefully sewed them. Finally, we put in some combs.

Thus, the bear coat was complete.

“.....This, erm, isn't there any place to wear this in Sieg's country?”

“Well, there isn't.”

“Do you think he'll be happy?”

While talking, I gently put the coat on Sieg.

.....Mm. Looks great on her.

While wearing the bear fur, Sieg continued to speak.

“Giving a gift is conveying one's feelings to another. What's important is not what's being given but the feeling.”

“Right. Indeed.”

From Sieg's words of encouragement, I decided to send the bear fur to grandfather.

A few days later, a letter from grandfather arrived.

“Grandfather, he sounds like he was troubled because people asked where he got it from when he wore it to a masquerade ball.”

“Really?”

But he didn't sound troubled at all from the letter.

He seemed happy, so I felt relieved that my work paid off.



As for the berries too, I have to get to processing them before it becomes too much work. I also needed to prepare for the upcoming seasons.

To make berry liqueur, I was making white liquor from the grains.

First, the threshed grains are carefully boiled in water. Then roasted grains are sprayed on top and left in a hut in which the temperature was controlled.

That is then moved to a big barrel and mixed with water before it's left for a day. After that, I repeatedly mixed steamed potatoes into that.

Finally, I added in birch sap and more water. After a few days, foams form on the surface. While keeping close watch on the foams, I stirred the mixture every few hours.

A week after the final step. Now, the mixture smelled quite strongly of alcohol. There was also a lot of foam. However, the foam soon died down.

We can't drink it as is, so the impurities have to be removed. That process is called distilling.

In a big iron pot, the almost completely liquid is put in, and a sealed wooden container with a bowl is put on top of that.

The droplets that form from the steam is the clean alcohol.

The droplets are collected into the wooden container, and those come out through a pipe.

Like this, alcohol is made.

Using that alcohol, I made berry liqueur.

Any berries are fine. This time. I decided to make the liqueur with the abundant blueberries and cranberries that we gathered.

Though I say make, it's a very simple process. In a sterilised bottle, alcohol, ice, and berries are put in. It's then left for three months in a cool place. In winter, we mull the drink to keep our bodies warm.

“By the way, I once made a terrible drink.”

I brought out a bottle from the shelf. It was the legendary potato alcohol.

“This is?”

“Akvavit. A drink made from potatoes and herbs.”

I found the method from grandfather's library so I made it out of curiosity.

Meaning 'water of life' in another language, the drink was unfortunately too strong.

It had a taste as if I was chewing on bitter herbs, tingling the senses. I realised that grandfather had written 'tastes like drugs' only after I made the thing.

“I heard that it was used as a disinfectant in other countries. It's strong enough to be considered as a medicine.”

“Hehh.”

“.....Want to try some?”

“Yes.”

While thinking that she was one fearless wife, I poured the drink in her kuksa. After thanking me, Sieg downed that in one go.

“How is it?”

“Not bad.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Feels like it would go well with pickled herrings.”

Because I wanted to be thought of as a great husband, I took out a jar of pickled herrings and served some to Sieg.

“.....I didn’t think that you’d actually have some.”

“They’re just made though.”

The fish is eaten with a sauce of spices, vinegar, onions, salt and sugar.

It also goes well with mustard.

After pouring some more for Sieg, I also brought cheese.

“Not drinking?”

I nodded as I served the cheese.

Oddly, Sieg continued to drink. I discovered then that she preferred dry alcohol more than sweet alcohol. So far, we only had sweet berry wine and the wine from the family’s house, so I had no idea. Of course, I also did think that the wine was dryer and more bitter than usual.

I discovered something more about Sieg after living with her for a few months.

However, she was still shrouded in mystery.

A mysterious woman, Sieglinde.

A former soldier, with top sharpshooting skills. She's good with handicrafts as well. She is quite stoic, but she is warm-hearted.

When I looked at her, she was drinking more alcohol from her wooden cup.

".....What is it?"

"No, I just thought that you drank well."

Because Sieg stretched her hand out to the bottle, I poured some more for her.

"Ritz is like a diligent wife."

"Joking again."

.....Diligent wife. But come to think of it, making alcohol and pickled herrings at home was not something a husband normally did. Wives did that.

Even as I wondered at how this happened, I continued to pour more drinks for Sieg when her cup got empty.

## Chapter 41 - After the Festival

Today, from early in the morning, I went out to the shop to buy ingredients for baking. Because of that Ruruporon's blueberry pie I had recently, I really wanted to eat confectionaries.

I bought flour, sour cream, butter, milk and chocolate bars. I have sugar, eggs and fresh berries at home so I don't have to buy those.

I learned how to make them from the madam. It's quite simple, just mixing the ingredients and baking.

It's only during this period, from spring to autumn, that I can buy these various ingredients. Thus, I did not hold back splurged on the ingredients.

Upon returning home, I picked up a basket full of berries, got eggs from the coop and went to the outdoors kitchen behind the house.

The berries I used this time were redcurrants and blackcurrants. It's a kind that is quite sour, and is also called 'the grapes of the north'.

Blackcurrant — also known as Cassis — is also used as medicine. They say it's good to have blackcurrant jam when one has a sore throat. The leaves also have good substances, so they are dried, powdered and roasted into tea.

I decided to make today's desert with such berries good for health.

First, I put in juniper powder and sugar into milk as I heated it in a pot.

Next, I mixed sour cream, milk, eggs and butter in a bowl and once the mixture was ready I poured it into the pot.

I applied plenty of butter on the cake mould, put in chocolate and berries, then poured the dough in. As I watched it bake on the stove, the berries floated to the top.

Later, I put a rod through it to check if it's done. It was ready.

It was quite good for being my first time. The contrast of the red and black colours of the currants were pretty too. A sweet scent hung about, making me get this indescribable feeling.

I wanted to eat the freshly made cake right away, but I heard that it tastes better if it becomes a little moist so I left it in a cool place.

However, today, cake was not the most important thing. I was going out to someplace with Sieg after a long time.

I was baking from the morning to relieve myself of this anxiety I had.

Well, even though I said going out, I'm not going anywhere too fancy.

If I wear something special, I would be noticed by people in the port where I knew many people, so I wore my usual clothes.

As I waited while sitting on the wooden crate, my wife came out.

“!”

For the first time, she wore traditional women's clothing. She always wore the unisex one that reached to her knees, or when she had to move a lot, like when we went out hunting, she wore men's clothing.

This one was made recently. When I was making summer clothes, I made some long ones out of whim.

“Uwa! Really cute! You look really good in it, Sieglinde!”

“.....”

Her straight shoulder-length hair were tied and let down behind her. She also put on make up, having a light red shade on her cheeks and a tint on her lips.

The traditional clothing had a skirt length that reached to just a little higher than the ankles. The hems were decorated with vivid stripes, giving it a colourful look.

“Good, really good. I should have made these sooner.”

“.....”

I walked in a circle around Sieg, slowly savouring the sight.

“Let’s go quickly, or we’ll be late for the carriage.”

“Right. Can I hold your hand?”

“.....”

She didn’t answer, but regardless I grabbed her hand.

I went out in this excited state, but we were just heading to the port where the ‘Sausage (Wurst) and Beer festival’ was taking place.

This festival happened once a year, when a merchant vessel came over. This year, coincidentally, I could enjoy Sieg’s homeland’s specialties.

Even as we rode the carriage to the port, my loosened expression did not return to normal.

After some time, we arrived at the port.

The square was already full of people.

“They’re selling sausages at the street stall, and beer is available in the tents.”

“I see. Then, let’s go.”

Since the place was overcrowded, I locked her arms with mine.

There were about thirty different kinds of sausages in the square, and there were also many stalls selling various foreign goods. First, I pondered on which sausage I would buy.

“There’s quite a variety, just for the sausages.”

“In my homeland, I heard that there are more than thousand varieties of sausages.”

“Hehh~!”

Grilled ones, boiled ones, deep fried ones, there were many different ways that they were cooked in.

“Uwa, the sausage is white! Why’s that!?”

“That’s ‘Münchner weisswurst’, a veal sausage. It’s white because there’s egg white and cream in it.”

“I see~”

It means ‘white sausage’ in Sieg’s homeland’s language, and it’s peeled before it’s eaten. I got curious, so I bought two: one for me and one for Sieg. The sausages were parboiled and then put into a bag. Looks like everything is uncooked. Thus, the ones made in the morning have to be eaten in the morning. Also, they say that ‘Weisswurst should be eaten before hearing the noon bell’.

Other than that, there were sausages that were about to burst from grilling, dried chewy ones, ones with cheese. I also bought one from Sieg’s hometown, a long one grilled with charcoal, called ‘Thüringer’.

After buying up enough sausage to be satisfied, we moved to the tents and ordered beer.

“Ah, should I buy potato fries too~, what should I do.”

“You should get what you want. You’ve been doing your best every day. You can spoil yourself a bit, you won’t receive divine punishment from that.”

I became happy. I didn’t think that she would praise me here.

“Anything you recommend for the beer?”

“Let’s see.”

There were quite a lot of kinds of beers. I frowned since I didn’t know any of them.

“There are three ways that beer is made.”

Brewed in high temperature, ‘ale’. Brewed in low temperature, ‘lager’. Brewed using natural yeast in the atmosphere, ‘lambic’.

Ales are tastier when warmer, and lagers and lambics are better drunk cold.

“Ales taste a bit like fruit, and is smooth. Lagers are clean. They didn’t sell lambic that much back home, so I don’t know very well about the taste, but I heard they tasted quite sour.”

To Sieg’s clear explanations, I nodded.

I bought ‘white beer (weizenbier)’ which was good for those who were weak to alcohol.

Sieg bought ‘black beer (schwarzbier)’ which had a strong flavour.

After i waited a while, beer was served in large wooden cups. They were so big, so I was surprised. I was amazed at how this was normal in Sieg’s country.

The white beer (weizenbier) I ordered wasn't all that white. On the other hand, Sieg's black beer (schwarzbier) was really black.

After toasting to each other's hard work, we drank.

The beer was kept warm, but it was surprisingly delicious. I had thought that beer was supposed to be kept cold up until now, but now I changed my mind.

The ale had a citric flavour and subtle sour touch, and had a smooth texture. I think I could drink this anytime. I also tasted Sieg's black beer, but it was an adult's taste.

Eating the sausage with the beer brought forth even happier times.

The white sausage that are peeled were soft because of the egg whites, and the spices went well with the citric flavour of the drink.

The sausages that were grilled crisply tasted really good with the potato fries. The chewing and the spiciness combined well, making the drink really easy to down.

"Ah, should I go buy some more?"

"No, no need."

"I have something I want, so I'll be going."

"Wait, me too."

"It's fine~"

I said that and left.

I don't know how much I drank. I'm walking straight, but I could tell that I was drunk. I had even caressed Sieg's hand while saying, "Ain't it good~ ain't it good". It's an unimaginable thing to do if I was sober.

Sieg looked at me with a troubled expression, but then I ended up saying that her expression was unbearable.

The worst drinking habits ever.

When I was going to the sausage market, I was talked to by a shop owner.

"Hey mister, how would you like some metal ornaments!?"

"....."

He talked to me from the thought that I am a Lapp. We are famous for liking metal ornaments. I was about to leave, but the owner said something that grabbed my attention.

"It's a rare platinum ornament. How about giving it to your wife or girlfriend?"

It was an earring in the shape of a snow flake. It was one that had a blue gem in the shape of a water drop surrounded by platinum decorations.

It was for one ear, sold on its own.

It was one that was in the colours Sieg liked, white and blue, in the shape of winter.

I thought that it was one that existed for her.

Of course, it was expensive. Since it was made out of platinum. When I told him that I did not have enough cash with me, he told me that I could pay the rest later. It seemed that he was going to set up shop in our village tomorrow.

"Then, I'd like that."

I bought it up.

I had some spare money since I made wooden carvings during the tourist season.

Without buying any more sausages, I went back to the tent where Sieg was.

Sieg looked relieved as she greeted me.

I called someone over and paid up.

We then got back on a carriage to take us home and returned quietly.



After returning home, I suggested to take it slowly because I couldn't work due to the alcohol in my system.

I was drunk, so bathing was dangerous. I just wiped myself off with medicinal water. I also washed my face, so I felt better.

Sieg bathed with Miruporon.

There was a possibility of drowning in the bath when one is drunk, so I asked someone to go in with Sieg.

I went over to Sieg, who was sitting at the chair by the window.

"Sieg, here."

"!"

Seeing the earring I held out to her, she looked surprised.

“.....What’s this?”

“Well, I have to mark my belonging, right?”

Saying that, I drew her hair back and held the earring up next to her.

It was a clean ear. She might be stolen if I didn’t mark her.

“What do you mean.”

“The same thing with the reindeers.”

“!”

Reindeers are important. If they’re not marked down, they might be stolen.

After saying that, I also whispered words of persuasion into her ears.

Of course, I was executing the plan grandfather suggested.

A while later, she nodded and accepted my gift.

I felt satisfied and placed the earring on her hands. Then I went to my room and went off the sleep.

I came back to my sense the next morning.

“——!”

I was dreaming. It was definitely a dream. It was a dream without a doubt.

As I was thinking of my stupidity yesterday, I could feel my face heating up from embarrassment.

When I went to living room, Sieg was not yet back from her morning stroll, so I let out a sigh of relief.

After I calmed down a bit, I placed the cake I made yesterday on the table.

Then, after a while, my wife came back.

“I’m back.”

“!?”

Seeing her having pierced her ears, I was at a loss for words.

When I saw the shining object on her left ear, I almost tripped over the chair behind me.

“Sieglinde-san, that, ear.”

“I got it pierced from the shop lady.”

I felt a surge of regret. I wrapped my head in my arms.

“It hurt, right?”

“No, not that much.”

“This.”

“.....”

“Wasn’t it unpleasant?”

“Why?”

“Well, marking like a reindeer.”

I could no longer look straight at her.

However, Sieg knelt down beside where I was sitting. Then, I have no choice but to look at her.

There, Sieg said something unexpected.

“I didn’t dislike it. I know that Ritz treasures his reindeers like no other.”

“!”

“I felt happy. Thank you.”

“Sieg.”

Her smile was blindingly bright that I had to close my eyes halfway.

I really am in love with her, I thought.

## Chapter 42 - Mushroom Hunting

In summer, a period called the white nights when the sun does not set visits. It's the opposite of the polars in which the sun does not rise.

When those days come, we go out for mushrooms. The baskets that were filled with berries are then filled with mushrooms.

The forest too was covered in the lush green shades of summer. The vivid green colour calmed one's heart.

While walking, we quickly came across a mushroom.

"Ah, Sieg, this is a poisonous mushroom."

"So you can tell from just looking."

A flamboyant red cap with yellow dots. It's a poisonous mushroom indeed, but it's not that dangerous. It's just bad enough to have to lie on the bed for about three or four days. In addition, there are no antidotes for this so we have to be cautious. It's supposed to be very delicious, so there are places where the mushroom is eaten after getting rid of the poison.

"This one's poisonous too."

"Looks normal."

The next one was also a poisonous mushroom. It has a round brown cap, that doesn't look too different from the mushrooms sold in shops. However, this one has a lethal poison. So it should never be eaten!

It's characteristic is that it has brown gills under the cap.

The thick, wide-rimmed mushroom is also poisonous, and the white one that looks similar to the common mushroom is also poisonous. For the one looks similar to a brain, the poison can be

removed by boiling it, but breathing in the steam poisons a person and eating it raw can kill. So I never actively tried to eat it. Plus it looked weird.

We came across even more poisonous mushrooms after that. It became a tour for poisonous mushrooms.

“Ah, this one’s fine!”

The one we finally found was one that had a round cap and looked as if it was hunching. It smells nice, and is good for making boiled dishes. It’s a strange mushroom that tastes different if it’s dried. There were a lot, so the two of us crouched down and gathered them.

“There’s a lot of mushrooms. I didn’t think that the ground would be this full of mushrooms.”

“Right..... there are about hundred different kinds of edible mushrooms, and about fifty different kinds of poisonous mushrooms.”

“Feels somewhat scary.”

“It’s fine as long as you remember which ones are fit for eating.”

Those who get adventurous are the ones who poison themselves.

There were many incidents of people getting poisoned, but by putting up drawings of the poisonous mushrooms on the bulletin board the number of those incidents were greatly reduced. Mushroom poison is dangerous, so we have to be careful.

After our morning stroll in the forest, the baskets were filled with mushrooms.

Ruruporon was taking the day off so I cooked alone today.

Of course, we were having the fresh mushrooms.

Since it's hard to cook at the fireplace in summer, I cooked outside at the kitchen behind the house.

Because I was crouching down, I was more tired than I thought I was. So I discussed with Sieg to eat a simple dish.

“This mushroom with the smaller caps are tastier.”

The basket only had mushrooms of the tastiest sizes. Feeling satisfied, I took in the scent.

I heard that removing the dust off the mushroom with a brush and wiping it with a wet cloth makes the scent last longer, but that method does not remove all the dust, so I just washed them in water.

Next to me, Sieg was spreading butter over rye bread. Then, she put a flat pan over the stove and put some butter on the pan as well.

“It will taste better.”

“It will?”

“It will.”

After saying that, Sieg had something else to do so she went inside.

Since I was left alone now, I decided to focus on cooking.

I cut off the hard stalk bits and sliced them thinly.

I put them in the pan Sieg prepared, and also put in some smoked boar meat that were cut into squares. I also put in some spices. It's done once the mushrooms are cooked.

Those are then placed the buttered rye bread, and finally some powdered cheese is sprinkled on top. A simple dish.

When I went back inside with the finished dish, Sieg was waiting while heating up some leftover soup from breakfast and brewing coffee.

“Would you have preferred a cold berry juice?”

“No, no way.”

I sat down and prayed to the Spirit for these blessing of nature, then started eating.

The bread was still soft and the mushrooms and smoked meat fried in butter went well together. Flavours flowed out of the mushroom, and the smoked meat had a nice savoury taste that spread in my mouth. The butter and cheese accented the aromatic flavour of the bread. Overall, it might have been a bit strong, but it was still great.

“It’s a flavour that makes me want to drink.”

“Indeed.”

I thought of the beer that I had back then. On such a sweaty day, cool beer would be nice. I thought of beer that I did not have right now.

I calmed down with coffee, and decided to work hard in the afternoon as well.



I’m working separately with Sieg in the afternoon. It seemed that she was going to work at embroidery with a lady in the neighbourhood.

I accompanied her halfway and parted ways in front of the shop.

“Good afternoon.”

“Oh, my lord.”

“I brought the baby bears.”

I turned in some baby bears I made during free time.

In this season, there are no tourists, but there sometimes are travellers visiting so we have to be prepared.

I looked at the silver ornament on the shelf.

“That is?”

“This? An ornament merchant came over before and asked me to sell this here.”

“Ah.....”

Could it be the merchant that sold Sieg’s earring? To consign goods to the shop while peddling in the village, he’s got quite the business acumen.

The flower shaped necklace caught my gaze. I thought it would look very good on Sieg.

“Buying?”

“No.”

I didn’t have money for that. The earrings were plenty expensive.

It’s free to just look, so I looked to my heart’s content. Then, a guest came in.

“Welcome. Oh my, long time no see.”

The visitor wasn’t a guest but an owner of a general store that sold traditional crafts from this village in the city.

It seemed that he came over every two or three months.

That person really liked that wooden baby bears I had, and so he bought them at a very high price. From a sudden income, I felt great.

“So, are you buying it?”

“No.”

Money is important. However good it would look on Sieg, I should not buy spontaneously like last time.

Also, we're in the period where the village's funds get low, so I can't spend money on unnecessary things.

I was playing her for a fool, so I bought few bottles of beer.

After returning home, I set about drying the mushrooms. Dried mushrooms are an important touch for soups in winter. I heard that naturally dried mushrooms have their taste condensed, and have more nutrients. I have no choice but to dry them then.

However, raw mushrooms are good to. The crunchy texture was unbearable. That was the fun of this season.

While I was doing that work, Sieg came back.

“Sieg, what about dinner?”

“Do you have some mushrooms left from lunch? That and some alcohol.”

“I bought some beer.”

“That's splendid.”

“Right?”

Dinner consisted of leftovers from lunch along with pickled fish, processed meat and rye bread. It was simple yet there was quite a bit.

After dinner, we took baths and played in the living room.

“It’s strange that it’s bright even though it’s night.”

“Sometimes, one can end up staying up all night.”

The sun does not set during white nights.

Thanks to that, I played games with Sieg until dawn.

The fatigue we had recently were all due to us playing late at night.

## Chapter 43 - Various Changes

Now that the house was full of drying mushrooms, we started picking berries again. There are kinds that only ripen during this season, so they have to be picked before the season is over.

Sieg and I walked through the forest in search of berries.

“Found it!”

What I found was a light green, semi-transparent berry.

“Are these berries too?”

“Right. Gooseberries. A cousin of the currants.”

What was it, I heard that ‘goose’ means ‘goose’ in a foreign language<sup>16</sup>, and the berries named so because the sauce made out of these berries went well with goose dishes.

The gooseberries are bigger and sweeter, so they’re tasty even when boiled. The leaves have medicinal properties, that they’re used for treating wounds.

“The branches have thorns, so be careful.”

“Alright.”

Most of the berry trees are shrubs. So yet again, we collected the berries in an uncomfortable position.

We then found yellow berries.

---

16 This language.....

“Uwa, there are lots——!”

In front of us, there were berries glistening like gems from the sunlight.

“Ritz, these are?”

“Raspberries.”

“Hehh.”

“The ones growing in these parts are mostly yellow ones. The red, purple or black ones are rarer.”

The representative of the sweet and sour berries, the raspberry. They cost a pretty penny in the market, and the berries are big too. It almost feels as if I am suffering losses if I find ones growing in the wild.

“Come to think of it, when the shop lady first saw these yellow raspberries she was surprised that they weren’t red.”

“It’s the first time seeing yellow berries for me too.”

“I see~”

It seems that yellow raspberries are rare for foreigners.

After filling the baskets with berries, we returned home.

After lunch, Sieg and I acted separately.

I first headed to an empty house at the outskirts of the village.

Hidden from the other houses, this house was built for my father’s research. However, it ultimately became unused because carrying everything over from the count’s mansion was such a hassle. So, it was being called a waste of money.

I promised to lend a house to Emmerich, so I came over to take a look.

When I unlocked the door and entered, I could only smell dust. Inside, there were a table, chairs, bookshelves and a bed, everything necessary for daily life. They were all wooden furnitures, so they should be able to used after cleaning them.

With the cleaning tools I brought, I cleaned a bit and came out. Since it would take a whole day to properly clean the house so I decided to take some time.

Next I headed to Aina.

She was always in a shady alley, where she was hidden from sight.

“Aina!”

“!”

When I spoke out to Aina, who was sewing, she flinched from surprise even though I was up close. It seemed that she was so focused that she did notice her surroundings.

“W-What!”

“No, I was just wondering if your mother and grandmother are feeling better.”

“Mum’s better now. Thanks to your medicine..... maybe.”

“I see. That’s a relief.”

Aina’s mother had sprained her back. So I bought some medicine for backaches at the port and brought them over. I also brought over a nourishing herbal infusion for her grandmother, but she did not drink it.

“Still, grandma can stand now. She’s better than before.”

“I see.”

“The money for the medicine, wait a bit.”

“It’s fine. I did the same for everyone else.”

“I don’t like being indebted.”

“You’re pretty stubborn.”

Aina was sewing while talking.

“Hey, why were you sewing here?”

“It’s not anything you need to know.”

“Isn’t it hard here?”

“.....”

Truth be told, her work was being hindered by a gentle breeze that kept blowing.

“Is it a secret?”

“.....”

“Hey, Aina.”

“No!”

As she shouted that, she dropped the cloth in her hand. I picked it up and discovered something.

“Th-This is.”

“Give it back!”

On the handkerchief, the name ‘Emmerich David’ was embroidered on.

She couldn't possibly embroider a foreigner's name in her house.

Aina blushed deep red and opened and closed her mouth.

Pretending to have not seen that, I proposed something.

"Right!"

"?"

I handed her the key to Emmerich's house.

"What's this?"

"The key to Emmerich's house."

"!"

"It's still a little dirty inside, but it's usable after cleaning."

"What do you mean?"

"You can use the house until Emmerich comes."

"!"

I thought it was a perfect place for Aina who was furtively reading letters or embroidering outside, so I lent the place to her temporarily.

"You know the house with the red roof at the outskirts of the village?"

Aina nodded. It seemed that father's research house was famous amongst kids as a haunted house.

"Be careful to not be found out by your grandfather."

“Okay.”

“But it might be better to tell your mother. About Emmerich, too.”

“.....”

Her mother who married into the Bergholm family was not really xenophobic. Just in case, I thought it would be better to let her know. Though I might be meddling, I advised her to do so.

“Okay.”

“Good luck.”

“Er, erm.”

“?”

Aina said, “Thank you,” with a soft voice.

She was becoming an adult too. I was moved by this child’s growth.



When I returned home, Miruporon told me that I had a guest so I headed to the living room.

“Aa, hello.”

“Hello.”

“Sorry for coming so suddenly.”

“No, no.”

It was the merchant that bought off the wooden baby bears. Because the goods sold well last time, he wanted to put in more orders.

“Now then, how many do you need?”

“I’d like to request twenty-five of them.”

“H, H~m.”

The prohibition on hunting will be lifted soon. Once the hunting starts, I won’t have enough time to be carving bears.

On top of that, I didn’t even start processing the berries I picked and I needed to fish and collect herbs before autumn.

When I frowned, the merchant wrote something on a sheet of paper resolutely.

“Then, how about at this price?”

“.....”

He proposed a price much higher than I expected.

Soon, the maintenance for the reindeer fences start. I was worrying over the fact that there wasn’t enough budget for that. But with this money, I can get the necessary budget.

Twenty-five until next month. If I stay up a bit it will work. So I accepted the commission.

Thus, I spent all the free time carving bears.

A few days of that later, I lacked sleep and was wobbling.

Sieg told me to take a break, but since I couldn’t abandon a commissioned work I continued anyway.

However, I reached the limit.

“No more. I can’t do it anymore.”

“That’s why I told you.”

“.....Sorry.”

I slumped on the chair by the window and take care of my fatigue, but it couldn’t be helped.

“Sieg, wake me up fifteen minutes later, no, ten minutes later.”

“Alright.”

Then, Sieg sat down and beckoned me to come over.

“Are you giving me a lap pillow?”

“Yes, so go to sleep already.”

I gladly took up her offer.

I was planning to enjoy her soft thighs as I went to sleep, but as soon as I lied down I fell unconscious.



I woke up from the hands that were softly caressing my head.

The warm hands were focused on caressing my head.

My fatigued body felt relieved and I did not sleepy anymore. This is Sieglinde’s power! The moment I thought that, the bell tolled.

“——U, Uwah!!”

That bell was the one in the evening, so I rose up in panic. Just in case, I checked the clock, but it was evening alright. Since I took my nap after lunch, I was sleeping for about three hours.

Because of the white nights, it was still bright outside. My sense of time was warped.

“Huh, could it be that you tried to wake me up but I didn’t wake up!?”

“No, I didn’t wake you up.”

“W-Why?”

“You were sleeping so peacefully.”

“.....”

It seemed that she was caressing my head she wondered how she should wake me up. I should have pretended to be asleep a bit longer, or so I regretted.

“Why were you making those bears until you became this overworked?”

“That’s,”

I couldn’t say that it was because I lacked money. But Sieg noticed my suspicious behaviour.

Moreover, I didn’t want to hide it from her, so I honestly told everything.

——The village budget was lacking, so I was trying to earn money on the side.

Pathetic. Lacking money, how pathetic, really.

Grandfather did not lack money for the budget. But if I’m lacking something, it means that something went wrong.

I confessed that to Sieg.

“Was that so?”

“.....”

After murmuring that, Sieg patted my back.

Then she gave me an advice.

“How about asking for advice from Hermann Artonen?”

“!”

Hermann Artonen is the captain that was recently assigned to the fortress here. It seemed that he did office work involving finances in the military, so she recommended that I ask for his help.

“Indeed. I should try that.”

Sieg also helped with making the bears. So somehow I was able to make twenty-five before the deadline.

Seeing that, the merchant received the goods very happily.

“Then..... you look like you’re going to busy now.”

“Indeed.”

Before I knew it, the forest was getting dyed in the colourful shades of autumn.

While I was holed up inside making bears, summer was going away.

“Erm, if it’s alright with you, please take this.”

“!”

What I gave to the merchant was a detailed instruction on how to make the wooden bear.

“A good craftsman should be able to make one from just the instructions.”

“S-Such an important thing, is it really alright?”

“Yes. I don’t think I can make more for a while.”

“Won’t it jeopardise your career as a master craftsman!?”

“No, it’s fine.”

Because I’m not a master craftsman of wooden bears.....

This was the last time I attempted such a rash method of earning money.

Thanks to Hermann’s wondrous ability in finances, there was money left over in the village budget.

The thing I was having a headache over was solved, and I felt much better.

## Chapter 44 - Sieglinde's Activity Diary

The white nights where the sun does not set ended, and the season was changing from summer to autumn.

The leaves were shedding from their green shade and dyeing into shades of bright red and yellow, and the breeze that brushed the skin felt chilly.

It was still morning in which the lights of the sky did not yet show itself.

It had become a part of my daily schedule to patrol around the dormitory when I was in the military.

That habit did not go away in these lands so I always ended up waking up early.

Also, I continued to take the morning strolls. At first, I was going out to melt into the village, but now I am going out from the anticipation of socialising with the villagers.

I took out a dress that had a fragrance of flowers from the drawer.

It was now cold, so I brought out one that had thicker fabric. I put that on and headed to the toilet. I brushed my teeth, washed my face and combed my hair before heading out.

When I came outside, a cool breeze told me that winter was approaching.

The lush green shade of this country was beautiful, but rather than that warm scenery I preferred the ear-chilling white world.

Just by thinking of that season approaching again, I felt my heart throb, unable to act my age.

I passed through the forest in front of the count's mansion and arrived at the village of red brick houses.

I quickly found my first villager.

“Good morning.”

“Oh my, Sieglinde-sama, good morning.”

There was a young lady around twenty drawing water from the well.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes.”

She was bearing a new life. It's become quite big, that it looks tough to do any housework.

“It's pretty big now.”

“Yes. Should be soon~ so or my mother-in-law said.”

I picked up the buckets for the pregnant lady.

The villager here are all hard workers. I can only be surprised that they can move around without rest even in this state.

“Is there anything else you need?”

“No, it's alright. Thank you.”

“I see..... I will hope for a healthy child.”

When I said that, she patted her belly with a happy face.

When we returned to her house, her husband ran out with a panicked expression. It seems that she went off to work without telling him.

I bowed to our neighbour and waved my hand to show that it was okay before I left.

After that, I went around various places and returned home after an hour.

In the front yard, the head of the Rango family was training with a spear. When our eyes met, he threw me a stick that was lying beside him.

We both held up a stick as we stared at each other. The morning bell was the signal for the start of the fight.

My opponent lashed his weapon out from its position in the waist like a sharp stab towards a prey. Since it was dangerous to receive that blow directly I put all my effort into avoiding it.

I twisted my body and raised my stick from its position at my waist, then I aimed for the back of his hand but before I could reach it my swing was parried.

The stick was merely struck hard, but it was flung away from my hand.

A refreshing defeat yet again.

I have yet to beat the white bear warrior.

To pay my respect, I pounded my chest as they did.

After I went inside I wiped my body from the medicinal bath the lady of Rango family had prepared and waited until it was time for breakfast in the living room.

Newspapers aren't delivered here. However, now that I was self-sufficient, I did have much care for the events of the world.

A while later, Ritzhard woke up.

"Morning, Sieg."

When I greeted him as well, he looked happy and kissed my cheeks. This apparently was the morning greeting of couples. I was doing this everyday, but I still wasn't used to it so I ended up darting my eyes about.

Today, we went to the forest to pick up fallen leaves.

It's not to enjoy the autumn foliage, but to collect leaves for fertiliser.

Every house has responsibility for it, and every adult has to collect three sacks of leaves.

"Well, that place is full of leaves so it won't take long."

While saying that, he took a bite off his bread with a sleepy face.

He seemed to be weak in the mornings, and is not fully awake until he has his coffee after breakfast. He is talking well, but his expression suggests that he will fall asleep quickly.

An hour after breakfast, we prepared many tools and armed ourselves since there was no telling what might happen in the forest.

"Nice weather today~"

"Indeed."

Ritzhard was still easygoing. That was his good point too.

Unlike me, who has a sharp and rough tone, Ritzhrd has a long and soft tone. We are polar opposites, but I recently realised that we were in a relationship that complemented each other.

I was much happier than I had first expected.

The relaxing life here fit me well.

The day we met, he said that we might not be able to have children, but that didn't matter.

Well, it wasn't because of that peaceful couple I met in the morning, but I thought that it was all fine as long as we continued to spend our life in peace.

While I was thinking that, something different from usual happened.

“——Wha!? This is.....”

“!?”

In the forest, a birch tree had its barks torn up horrendously.

Other trees were carved out with knives.

Once a bark is taken off a birch tree, it does not regenerate. So barks are collected from winter to spring from the firewood.

Ritzhard proceed further in silently.

“——!”

“.....”

In a clearing, there were traces of someone lighting a fire and a mountain of skinned rabbit carcasses.

There was one that was roasted too. Maybe they were trying to eat it. A hunted animal gets rigor mortis, so it wouldn't be tasty though.

Then, Ritzhard said something with a trembling voice.

——There are poachers in this forest.

He buried the rabbits in a hole and left the clearing.

Ritzhard strode quickly ahead in silence. He did even not look back to see if I was following him well as he usually did.

He headed to the forest. He went to the captain, Hermann Artonen and told the captain of the things he saw in the forest.

“Hah, such a thing happened.”

“It’s the first time this happened after I became a lord, so I was surprised too.”

Ritzhard was calmly laying out the details, but he was vehemently enraged.

It’s no surprise that he is infuriated. They were living quietly with the gifts of the forest, but a complete stranger came and stole them away.

“I see. We’ll go out on a patrol at night.”

“Take me along.”

“Please leave it to us first.”

“.....”

Ritzhard reluctantly accepted Captain Artonen’s words.

After three days, they tracked down their traces, but failed to capture the actual people.

Captain Artonen wrote down the culprits’ whereabouts on the map.

“At this rate, the next time they’ll be appearing here.”

He pointed to the middle area of the forest. The culprits were probably moving in small numbers, moving stealthily.

“I’ll be going today.”

“No, please!”

“It’s a full moon today. So I won’t take lanterns and ambush them in the dark.”

Calling themselves ‘the people of the forest (Salonen)’ they see much better in the dark. In addition, it’s a full moon today. He said that the bright moonlight shone upon the forest blindingly.

“I understand. However, can you please take about two people?”

Ritzhard nodded and accepted Captain Artonen’s proposal.

After returning home, many unsettling tools were laid out on the living room table.

Daggers, a gun, a club and ropes.

He was going over each of them carefully.

“Ritz”

“What is it?”

He was making a scary expression, but when I talked to him he returned to the usual Ritzhard.

While suppressing the pain I had in my chest, I told him something.

“Please take me with you tonight.”

“Definitely not.”

I did think that he would say that, so I ended up letting a sigh.

However, I persisted this time.

“I was a soldier. I can help.”

“No. Sieglinde, stay still at home.”

“But,”

“Please.”

“.....”

Earnest and passionate eyes stared straight into me.

When I saw those eyes, I couldn't help but be at a loss for words.

“I know that you are able to handle yourself as a soldier, but I don't want you to be put in danger.”

“.....”

“You are my one and only wife.”

He's probably the only one in the world. The only one who treats me as a woman.

However, I also thought the same.

“I, too, don't want to be like before.”

“.....”

Some time ago, he came back with a bruise on his face. That day, he went to the fortress because there was a new person coming. It was clear that something happened there, but Ritzhard just said that he fell over and did not say anything more.

I couldn't bear seeing him get injured at someplace where I was not with him. So even though I was going against his wish I resolved to go with him.

I told him what I was thinking.

“If you are in any harmed, I want to be beside you at that moment.”

“!?”

I am not thinking of fighting for him. However, I wanted to share the pleasures and pains of life with him.

In the end, Ritzhard let me come along.

Whatever he says, he ultimately grants my wish. That’s why I kept at it tenaciously.

Nighttime.

We proceeded under the moonlight with Ritzhard at the head.

He said that the full moon would shine brightly, but it was still very dark.

I tightly clenched the gun I had on my shoulder. It’s impossible to shoot accurately in this darkness.

I felt that beads of sweat formed on my brows, so I wiped them off but I did not feel refreshed at all.

I took up the gun on many battlefields, yet I had this tension. I questioned myself as to why I was so nervous, but no answers came.

In front of me, Ritzhard walked on without hesitation.

About three hours later, we arrived at the entrance of the middle area of the forest.

We bent down and walked cautiously, checking for any sounds.

A while later, Ritzhard stopped them with a hand signal. The soldiers that were following behind him went prone and waited for their next order.

Far away, voices could be heard, and a faint light could be seen.

Ritzhard held up his fingers to indicate how many there were.

There were two people.

As Captain Artonen said, they were moving in small numbers.

I could tell that the poachers were approaching.

In the darkness, they chatted, "This place is a treasure trove," in a loud voice.

As the tension built up, Ritzhard quietly laid the strapped gun on his shoulders down on the ground.

I wasn't sure what he was planning, but we were keeping quite so I did not have the leisure to ask.

We did not know the enemy's equipment yet, so couldn't move rashly. The moment I was thinking that, a little further away, something white came out of the bushes.

The surprised poachers raised their voices.

"Bear——!"

"Can't be, the legendary, white bear!?"

While the enemies were in confusion, Ritzhard picked up a stone from the ground, juggled it in his hand, then threw it with all his might at their lantern.

"!?"

The thrown stone shattered the lantern's glass and put out the light.

To the poachers who were driven into further confusion, Ritzhard threw another stone. After confirming a scream, he rushed out on his own.

I could only hear sounds of something hitting something and the cries of the poachers.

Since we could not see properly in the dark, we did not dare to move.

A few minutes later, Ritzhard shouted that we can now have some light, so one soldier lit up his lantern.

When we approached, we saw the poachers tied up and writhing on the ground.

Ritzhard arrested the criminals who were ruining the forest in the darkness.

In addition, the bear they saw was Teoporon.

He happened to be out hunting when the poachers saw him.



Like so, the case was closed.

At Ritzhard's unexpected exploits, the soldiers were surprised.

"The lord, he could do it if he tried."

"I wonder why he normally acts like he wouldn't even kill a bug."

"No idea."

I didn't think that Ritzhard would do that himself, so I was surprised too.

"His lordship probably knows how to control his strength."

"....."

If he did know, I wish he would have used it to protect himself.

However, I changed my mind today.

That Ritzhard was not a fluffy fairy living in a pretty world, but a yeti living in a harsh environment.

I sincerely hoped that this village will continue to be peaceful without him having to raise his hand.

This was the only time I saw him angry in my life.

## Chapter 45 - My Hidden Feelings, to You.

The season was not fall, and the prohibition on hunting was lifted.

First, we hunted birds. In this season, the migratory birds, especially ducks, are tasty.

For the birds living near water, I scattered grains by the lakeside to feed them.

The birds living in water are not hunted using guns but by traps. There are those who use guns, but those are only people who are good sharpshooters.

The trap we were using was a web made out of tough ropes tied on a square frame. That is set by the waterside, and a string is attached to the trap on a branch. Once birds are lured in by the feed, I let the string go and catch the birds.

At the place where the feed is, a hole deep enough for the birds is dug so that it won't be able to escape on the trap is activated.

A short distance away from the lakeside, I waited with Sieg.

I was keeping watch for about an hour, but no birds came yet.

Since the feed mixed with sand that I scattered over the place was already gone, there probably are other birds in the area.

As to why we mix sand in the feed, it's because it helps the bird's digestion.

We are hunting migratory birds this time, and they are relatively thin in this season. So we have to feed them to help their digestion and fatten them up.

The birds caught in traps taste really snipe. Since it's caught without struggling, it does not smell bad and we can even enjoy the strong taste of blood.

The sky was clear today. The weather was nice, but our prey did not appear.

Well, still, it was nice to just be leaning against each other with Sieg. When I stared at her profile, she was waiting for the birds to come with a serious face.

“Hey, Sieg.”

The wild birds don't approach if they can hear people. So I leaned in closer and whispered quietly.

“.....What is it?”

She said in a voice quiet for only me to hear. It was like having a secret conversation, so it was interesting.

“When we get back home.....”

“!”

“What should we play?”

Sieg dropped her knife on the floor.

“Huh, Sieg, what's——!”

While I was talking to my wife, the birds came!!

About twenty. After checking that they were all focused on the feed, I let go of the string holding the trap up.

The trap fell down and the birds were caught in the trap.

I collected the immobilised birds in leather bags. It's because the merchants buy them off at a high price if they're alive.

There are eighteen in total. The rest escaped.

“Well, this is it.”

At the same place, I scattered more feed and left.

The caught prey are hauled back on a wheeled sleigh.

On the way back, we were walking back while looking at the autumn foliage. Because I was walking while looking up, I went to the wrong direction.

“Ah!”

“?”

When I was about to apologise that I took a wrong turn, I found something lovely there.

At an animal trail, I found flat peaches, a flat shaped fruit. I did know that there are these trees in the forest, but it was the first time I saw the ripe fruits.

I quickly climbed up the tree with a leather bag and received the blessings of nature.

The fruit itself is small, and it has a peculiar shape as though it was pressed down from the top. Once I got up, I was surrounded by the sweet scent from the fruit.

The peach was without a single scratch. I took one off.

Just in case, I peeled it a bit and tasted for poison..... Mm, surprisingly sweet. There wasn't a numbing feeling at the tip of my tongue, and I remembered the taste too. It was a flat peach without a doubt.

It was a nice peach, so I tossed one down to Sieg who was staring up.

Sieg nibbled into the peach without peeling it.

“How is it?”

“Delicious.”

It seemed that they sold these peaches in her homeland. Apparently, they don't peel the skin.

“Let's take some for Teoporon and his family too.”

“Alright”

I dropped down a bag full with enough peaches for us too. Then she tossed up an empty bag. I became greedy and felt that maybe a merchant might buy these, so I ended up harvesting three bagfuls of peaches.

After selling the birds and the fruits to the visiting merchants in the village, we returned home.

Among the birds we caught today, I brought back home only one mallard.

Also called 'green neck (colvert)', the duck is preserved for three days in the icehouse. Then, the bugs on the feathers die out and its pores contract, so it becomes easier to pluck its feathers.

Three days later.

I brought out the mallard out and wiped the whole thing with a wet cloth. This is to make sure that it won't be slippery.

Then I grabbed it by the neck and plucked out the feathers. I have to pluck out the little feathers at the groin as well. If there are any feathers left the meat does not smell good.

The strong tail feathers took a lot of strength to pluck. My fingers hurt a bit.

The remaining short feathers were seared off. Once that's done, I washed it in water and cut off the burnt bits.

While cooling the body, I cut off the head and wings. Its throat is filled with grains and sand, so I cut open its neck to find the throat.

With careful movements, I gutted out the intestines and put in a clean cloth inside.

Then, the legs are tied and the duck is hung up to mature. Large ducks take about five days. Small ones don't need any maturing.

“.....Well, this is how ducks are cooked.”

Since processing birds were similar, I didn't think that I needed to tell Sieg, but because she strongly wished for it I taught her how.

“I wonder if I should leave the bird hunting this year to Sieg.”

Truth be told, I disliked hunting for birds. I told her that it might be better for us to act separately this time, so that I can go off to hunt medium-sized animals.

“On second thought, it's still quite dangerous. Let's go together.”

Sieg agreed.



Nighttime.

A letter from grandfather arrived. It was an invitation to the annual ball. Of course there was one for Sieg too.

Also, something arrived from Sieg's family.

“.....”

“Wow!”

There was a deep blue dress in the box. On top of that, there were gems and decorations matching Sieg's hair. There were also decorations for the head, shoes, and ornaments.

"So I am to wear this to the ball."

"Apparently."

Sieg softly closed the box without taking the dress out.

"You're not going to try the dress on?"

".....No, not really."

Sieg said as she looked ahead, thinking of the future. Before she came here, she was looked at pitifully by her family when she put on a dress.

"What should I say..... but, I did like the old dress you wore before."

"That's a personal opinion."

"I wonder~"

"....."

Sieg placed the gift box on the table and sat down on the chair by the window.

Then, with a deeply moved look, she murmured, "It's almost a year now."

Indeed. It was almost a year since I met Sieg.

It passed by so quickly.

I think this ball will be a good opportunity for Sieg to return home.

"Are you glad to return home?"

“Well, yes. It’s good filial piety to show my parents my healthy appearance.”

“I see.”

Once she returns home, she might never come back here.

She said that she will spend her life in these remote lands, but people’s emotions are fickle things.

To thank her for everything so far, I sat down in front of her and looked up at her face.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

Because it was like I was saying farewell.

I shook my head and encouraged myself.

“——Thank you for coming here, Sieglinde. This year is not over yet, but I really had fun.”

When I said that, Sieg too changed her expression.

It was a divinely beautiful smile.

“I’m sorry that I forced on an inconvenient lifestyle on you.”

“No, there’s nothing like. I will continue to count on you in the future, my husband.”

“!”

From Sieg’s sudden words, I finally got the courage to tell her my feelings that I kept hidden.

——I love you.

## Chapter 46 - The Husband, Loved by the Raptor Wife.

Having heard my sudden confession, Sieg made a surprised expression.

“.....”

“.....”

Erm, that was, I made a wrong move.

At a moment like this, I have to have my eyes level to hers, but now I chose the unfortunate method of crouching down on the floor and looking up at my wife's face to confess my love.

On top of that, Sieg was looking troubled like never before.

The always imposing Sieg was making a mysterious expression.

I really shouldn't have confessed to her.

I had misunderstood her love.

She was only receiving my hugs and kisses because she felt pity for this lonely man in the snow country. She was just being earnest in trying to not let others find out that our life is a temporary one.

For Sieg, I was just like an undependable younger brother.

Her love for me was that of familial love. It was not a romantic feeling.

“.....Sieg, erm, sorry. I didn't mean to make you troubled. You said to wait for your answer, but I couldn't.”

While saying that, I didn't want to see Sieg who looked troubled, so I wrapped my arms around my head.

I'm impoverished, and I don't have the qualities of a proper lord. I can't provide my wife with a peaceful life then.

I have no right to be loved by such a kind, earnest and cute woman like Sieg.

Since I couldn't stay like this, I looked up, to Sieg.

To spend the remaining time happily, I tried to laugh it off, but the usual smile did not form. I failed to smooth things over.

What came out instead were foolish words of a sissy.

"Please forget it."

"What do you mean?"

"Because, I want to stay as husband and wife at least until the contract is over."

It's okay. Everything will be back to normal after I sleep.

I quickly stood up and bid her good night, then quickly turned around.

"Wait."

"I"

My body stopped regardless of my will. I was like a properly trained dog.

"Look over here."

“.....”

I turned around with my eyes still glued to the floor.

“Ritz, you are mistaken.”

Mistake, I wonder where. I tried to think long and hard, but my head did not comply.

“Did you think I am such a docile woman to let anyone kiss me on the cheeks?”

“.....”

“Did you think that I wore the earring without knowing what it meant?”

Sieg might like me. I had denied that thought so many times.

People’s true feelings are shrouded in many things such as pity, mercy, and lies.

The more one ponders, the deeper the mystery gets.

“I see.”

“?”

“So you won’t believe it unless I say it directly or show it with my actions.”

“Eh, Sieg, wha.....!?”

Sieg strode over here and tightly embraced me.

I was at a loss for words from her sudden action.

Some time passed while I was still being embraced.

There, Sieg broke the silence.

“Ritzhard Salonen Revontulet. ——I am in love with you.”

“!?”

“Please accept me as your wife.”

I doubted my own ears.

I thought that it was a dream. But her warmth around my shoulders, and her trembling fingers told me that it was all real.

I put my arms that were limp around Sieg and embraced her.

“.....Thank you. I'm happy.”

“It's fine if you know now.”

I was staying still, connected with her, but I felt that something was off.

“Sieg, can I ask you something?”

“What is it?”

I was always bothered about that, so I mustered up my courage and asked.

I asked why her breasts always felt so tough when I hugged her.

“Are you wearing something else?”

“Aa, a leather armour.”

“.....”

It was a habit she has from her days in the military. She always wore armour under her clothes. Her thighs were so pleasant and soft, so I thought that it was weird that her breasts weren't.

And then I asked something more.

"Huh, even when you're asleep?"

"No, I sleep naked at night."

"!?"

I felt moved for some reason when I got that unexpected information.

It was also a moment when one of her mystery was solved.

"Shall we sleep now?"

"Alright."

I won't go over details as to what happened next.



Though Sieg and I now had a proper wife and husband relationship, our life did not change that much.

"Morning, Sieglinde."

"Good morning."

As always, Sieg had went out on her morning stroll and was grinding coffee beans before I woke up.

When I'm surrounded by the scent of the roasted coffee beans, my drowsiness disappears before I know it.

I gave her a morning kiss on the cheek. Though I've been doing this for a few months now, she still made an awkward expression.

"You don't like it?"

".....No, I don't dislike it."

Hearing that, I mustered up some more courage and kissed her on the lips.

She was sitting facing the table, so there wasn't anything more though.

While I was slinking around the her, breakfast arrived.

"I'm going over to help with renovating the house."

"I see."

Today we are acting separately.

As for me, Emmerich was coming over tomorrow so I was thinking of visiting the house that is to be lent to him.

It's been a while since I gave the keys to Aina, but I don't think there would be a lot of change.

In addition, though Emmerich managed to get a holiday, he's spending four days just for moving to and fro, and he's staying only for a day. A strange trip I have to say.

To welcome him, I got a pair of shoes and a hat made out of rabbit fur, and a tradition clothing that I asked a crafter to make. I also thought of giving him a carpet, but after talking with Sieg it was decided that it should be done after learning his preferences.

I put the wrapped gifts in a leather bag and headed to the house in the outskirts of town.

The blood-red curtain, which was one reason why the house was called a haunted house was removed. What replaced it was a blue curtain with a lovely white floral pattern.

I went inside with a spare key and I was astonished by the change.

First, the dirty vase with the wilted flower was now a glistening vase with a fresh flower. There was also a square cloth with a floral pattern laid out beneath the vase.

The dusty hallways and rooms were clean, and was fit for living.

And inside the living room, there were fabrics with lovely embroidery.

On the table, there was fabric for the curtain, the tablecloth and for the sitting mats. Covered with cloth on the chair back, the living room coated in blue and white was like a house of fairies in the forest.

I was surprised that it was all made by Aina.

Then, Emmerich will be living here. By himself.

When I approached the drawers in the bedroom, I discovered cloth for the pillow covers, and for the blanket covers, all embroidered beautifully.

I realised at that point. It was not a house of fairies. It was the house of a newlywed couple.

.....Let's go back.

I pretended to have not seen them and left the room.

When I arrived at the entrance, I noticed the doorknob turn.

The face I saw was a completely unexpected one.

“IS IT YOUUUUU——!?!”

“!?”

I thought it would be Aina, but there was an old man pointing a gun at me.

He is Aina’s grandfather, and the best hunter in the village.

Next to him, Aina was there, shouting out to stop him.

—— C-Could this be a misunderstanding?

## Chapter 47 - Aina's Activity Report

Dear Emmerich David,

Autumn is growing deeper every day here. Are you well?

Here in these remote lands, it snowed for the first time just yesterday. The white carpet over the ground accents the autumn foliage.

The hunting season is starting soon, and the village is getting busy, so I am getting anxious. Because the men of the village become rougher once the hunting season starts.

I hope for the warm seasons to come quickly.

Also, I want to meet Emmerich-san quickly.

Aina Salonen Bergholm.

I continued to rewrite the letter over and over again.

'When spring comes, I will be able to meet Emmerich-san again, so I will endure with that as encouragement.' I changed the final sentence to that. I then put the letter in the envelope and sealed it with candle wax.

The wooden box dad had made is full of letters from that man.

It is my treasure box. For a long time, I had only cherished the box so it used to not have anything.

I put that box into the drawer.

The house I am in right now is the he will be living in. Ritzhard-oniichan lent me the keys, and let me live here.

I also checked on the tablecloth, the curtains and the sitting mats.

Before I realised it, the room was getting further away from the appearance of a man's house, but I continued anyway thinking that they can be removed if he doesn't like them.

In the early morning, once my secret work is over, I go home and start working.

I remove the snow from the roof before the sun rises, prepare breakfast, wash the clothes with cold water, clean the house, prepare lunch, make handicrafts, go shopping if there's not enough ingredients, then prepare dinner.

After dad passed away and mum fell ill, I did the same work every day.

However, in that daily life, a change came.

I met Emmerich David.

He was a foreigner that did not know the infamy of the Bergholm family.

Our family is hated terribly.

There's the arrogant attitude and the hate for others. Full of disdain, swatting away helping hands.

It's just keeping true to the teachings of the Spirit, but that earned the ire of the villagers that were trying to abandon old ideas.

But then, he approached and talked to me, not knowing that I was in that family.

When I first met him, I thought that he was a weird person, but I soon learned of his character through letters.

The soldier Emmerich was, well, a strange person.

He's living in harsh conditions, but the things written on his letters are only those of peace. He writes of the snacks he had that day, of his dog, of the flower he's been raising.

They were such trivial letters, but before I knew it, I was looking forward to them.

I noticed that they were the only things decorating the otherwise fruitless life here.

His frequent letters were my only source of joy.

While I was spending time like that, a joyful news came.

It was that he was coming over to visit on a holiday.

I read the letter over and over again. I was so happy that I decided to take it with me back home to read it again.

Jubilant, I did not check the surroundings and went out of the house, but soon let out a shriek of surprise.

The family hunting dog was here.

And needless to say, grandpa came out of the bushes.

“You!! You were being strangely buoyant recently, so this was it!!”

Grandpa grabbed my arm and took the key from my hand.

He opened the door, but of course there was no one inside.

“Is there anyone living here!?”

“No, no one’s living here yet!”

“Stop lying!”

Thankfully, grandpa does not know that this house is Ritz-oniichan’s. If I stay silent and endure the whole thing, everything will pass without trouble.

For a few days after that, I kept silent to grandfather's interrogations. I was scolded everyday, and I was sometimes even slapped, but I'm also a member of the Bergholm family. As if I tell him everything.

However, the damage was done in other places.

Mum's condition, which had been recovering recently, worsened again because of grandpa's moodiness. Grandma too, who was listening from her room, did not open her mouth.

To hide the bruises on my cheek and under my eye, I worked with a cloth bandaged around my head.

A kid in the village saw my face when I was on my way to shop for goods, but the kid pretended to have not seen me.

That was normal. The only people who talked to me were Ritz-oniichan or Sieglinde-san. To not get found out by those two kind people, I shopped quickly.

The mood in the house was the worst. Grandpa did not even go out on his hunts to keep watch on me.

Finally, one day, having run out of patience, grandpa went out of the house with a gun, saying that he will ambush the man.

Tomorrow, Emmerich is coming to the village. If he waits out by the house, it'll be found out.

I chased after grandpa who was striding to that house and shouted for him to stop, but of course he didn't listen.

Grandpa called me over and opened the door with the key.

When he opened the door, coincidentally, there was a silhouette of a person.

“IS IT YOUUUUU!!”

There was my incensed grandpa and the surprised Ritz-oniichan.

“Grandpa, stop! The lord is not involved in this!”

“Ei, let go!”

The gunstock I was holding down hit my cheek, so I collapsed there.

“Aina!”

Unfaltering by the gun pointed at him, Ritz-oniichan pushed away grandpa and rushed over here.

At that moment, a gunfire rang out.

The bullet grazed Ritz-oniichan’s arm and headed for the ground.

“Ritz-oniichan!”

“.....It’s been a while since I was called like that.”

Even though he was bleeding, he had the leisure to murmur that.

He was being so carefree even in such a dire situation so I was bewildered for a moment. However, I soon realised that he was grazed by a bullet so I quickly tied a handkerchief over the wound to stop the bleeding.

Grandpa was standing absentmindedly while still having the gun pointing over here.

He probably didn’t mean to actually shoot someone. Though it might look as though he is expressionless to others, as family I could tell that he was shaken up.

Ritz-oniichan looked at my face and frowned. Then I remembered that I had bruises on my face.

My grandfather was holding a gun and I had bruises. He probably realised what was going on from that.

“Bergholm-san, can you hear me out?”

“.....”

“I’ll be taking Aina for a night.”

“I won’t let you do that!”

“My wife will take care of her, so please rest easy.”

“!?”

Grandpa learned then that the lord had married.

Ritz-oniichan told grandpa that they will talk more the next day, and then took me away.

The next day.

It was morning of the day when Emmerich was coming.

I spent the night at the lord’s mansion crying in front of Sieglinde-san.

I had bruises on my face in addition to the eyes swollen from tears.

“W-What should I do, Emmerich’s, coming, today.”

“Don’t cry, it will better with a warm towel.”

“.....”

Sieglinde-san used her time to wipe my face with a warm towel, and put on makeup to hide the bruises as much as possible. She lent me Ritz-oniichan's mum's clothes. The skirt was a little short, but she told me that young women these days wore knee-length colts so it would be fine.

A while later, a guest visited the mansion.

It was Emmerich.

The moment I saw him, I lunged into his arms.

I thought that I won't be able to see him again.

I had makeup on, yet I cried so much that my face became a mess.

Emmerich hugged me without saying anything.



After I calmed down, we all sat down together and told Emmerich everything.

"This time, I think you should reveal everything to your family."

Ritz-oniichan said that, but both grandpa and grandma are very stubborn. They won't forgive.

"What do you want to do, Aina?"

"....."

I have no idea.

I was being delusional, just wanting to forget everything and live happily with Emmerich.

However, I can't abandon my family.

"If I'm forced to choose between Emmerich or family, I have to choose family."

The teaching of the Spirit, cherish your family, was rooted deeply within me. I could not accept only myself being happy.

After I said that, tears rolled down my cheek again.

I wiped my tears, thinking that it was not convincing at this rate, but the tears did not know when to stop.

"Aina, it's alright. Let's go talk to them. I'll persuade your grandfather."

Ritz-oniichan said that, but I couldn't see the talk going well.

A few hours later.

At the place of the talk, there was grandpa, mum, who was looking pale, Ritz-oniichan, Sieglindesan and Emmerich.

Grandpa didn't have his gun with him. I felt relieved at that.

Ritz-oniichan mediated and told grandpa about Emmerich, but grandpa maintained his disapproving stance.

"So you were instigated by a foreigner!! You are being deceived!!"

"Bergholm-san, it's different. Emmerich is planning to move in here."

"As if an outsider can ever survive these lands!! For example, your parents left this village!!"

Because he was attacked in a sensitive spot, Ritz-oniichan was at a loss for words.

“Get out!!”

Grandpa grabbed Emmerich’s arm and tried to force him up.

“The next time you step into this house, I’ll shoot!!”

“Grandpa!!”

“You stay still!!”

I clung to him to stop him, but he raised a hand, aiming at me.

However, he couldn’t swing that hand down.

Emmerich had grabbed that hand.

He hid me behind him.

And from an unexpected direction, a voice came.

“——Won’t you please stop now?”

“!”

Mum, who was staying silent, was glaring at grandfather.

“Father-in-law, have you ever thought of this child’s happiness?”

“I am looking for her marriage partner!”

“Then who’s the candidate?”

“.....”

“I was always anguished at myself who could not move. I was sorry for causing trouble to Aina.”

Mum looked at me and smiled as if to say that everything was alright.

“Now, let’s live harmoniously with just the three of us, mother-in-law, father-in-law and me.”

“W-What!?”

“Emmerich-san, can you take Aina away to your country.”

Emmerich looked surprised, but he soon said, “Please leave it to me.”

“What idiotic nonsense are you blabbering!?”

“Father-in-law, you’re too arbitrary!! You’re blocking such a cute granddaughter’s path to happiness!!”

“Shut up!!”

Grandpa tried to push Emmerich away, but he held fast while hiding me behind him.

“Emmerich-san, run!”

From my mum’s voice as the signal, Emmerich darted out the house while carrying me.

Grandpa tried to give pursuit, but Sieglinde-san held him down.

Ritz-oniichan followed closely behind.

“Emmerich, go to my house.”

“Okay.”

After that, Ritz-oniichan ran back into my home.

A little while after we ran away to the lord's mansion, Ritz-oniichan and Sieglinde-san came back.

When we gathered in the living room, there was a surprising news.

"Aina, won't you go to Emmerich's country."

"!?"

In front of me, a passport and a suitcase mum prepared was laid out.

"To be honest, I talked over it with Aina's mother a while back."

"!?"

It seems that Ritz-oniichan predicted that it might come to this.

"As you saw, Aina's grandfather didn't listen, did he?"

"B-But,"

"Aina, are you afraid of living overseas?"

Sieglinde-san asked, but I was still confused so I couldn't answer her right away.

"I can't leave my family behind."

"It's alright, so trust your mother and try going once. Right, Emmerich?"

Emmerich was looking at me and nodding.

"I will protect Aina."

“!”

Ultimately, I heeded the adults’ advice and left the village.



The life overseas I was suddenly thrust into was full of surprises.

As for the language, I had been studying in secret with a book I had bought at the gift shop to surprise Emmerich, so it wasn’t too bad.

Moreover, my daily work in a foreign country was the same.

I cooked, cleaned and did the laundry.

Living together was awkward, and was a series of shyness and reservation, but every day was new and fun.

After Emmerich retired from the army, we moved into the countryside. There we raised goats and a cat he brought from the city.

He worked at the village office.

It was modest and quiet, but the joyful days continued.

After a year and a half of living like that, Emmerich told me something.

“Aina-chan. Let’s go back to the village.”

“!”

I couldn’t understand him. My eyes opened wide in surprise.

Then, a surprisingly sorrowful voice came out.

“I, was it too hard?”

“Eh?”

Emmerich always said that my food was delicious, said that my work was clean, and also thanked me for doing the household chores, so I thought he was content.

However, that might not have been the case.

I was still worried about my family in the village.

“Alright.”

“I’m planning on leaving after a month.”

“Are you dropping me back home?”

“Eh?”

Emmerich looked puzzled.

“Aina-chan, what are you talking about?”

“What do you mean, what are you talking about!?”

I thought that I was being sent back to the village, but Emmerich was suggesting to permanently move into the village.

What a big misunderstanding.

“No, really? You’ll live with me in the village?”

Emmerich nodded with a smile.

Thus, we went back to the village.



Even after a year and a half, the village had not changed much.

But I was surprised at how my family changed.

Mum was working energetically, and grandma was working outside as well.

In contrast, grandpa had pined away, and apparently even hunting did not go well.

“A-Aina, I’m sorry.”

Surprisingly, grandpa easily approved the marriage.

It seemed that he was constantly harassed by mum.

We started living in the house that Ritz-oniichan lent to us.

I visited my family every day and chatted with mum and grandma who were in much better conditions.

Today, Emmerich went out to hunt boars with grandpa again. As a man from the military, he was good with the gun and had talent for hunting, or so grandpa said.

“Aina!”

When I turned around, there stood the man who took care of me from when I was little.

“Morning, Ritz-oniichan!”

I greeted him with a smile.

Today, the village in the remote lands was at peace again.

## Chapter 48 - Still Filling Up

“Ritzhard, wake up.”

“.....N~n”

“Oi, wake up!”

“.....Ye~s”

Morning. Sieg shook me intensely and woke me up. No, I was still half-asleep.

“S-Sieg, shake me a bit softer~”

Meanwhile, I was getting shaken very violently.

“I’ll be up soon~ ....., Rather, I thought I would be awake before you came back from your stroll~”

“It’s already well past that!”

“Eh?”

When I squinted my eyes open, I saw two soft mounds drawing a nice curve at the corner of my sight.

Just in case, I reached out to check the softness, but just before I could touch it my wrist was grabbed harshly and returned to its original position.

“What are you doing from so early in the morning!”

“Well, they were there.”

“.....”

While lying downwards on the bed, she helped me up. While naked.

Normally, I feel sleepy even after a long time, but seeing my wife's sensuous figure, I was fully awake.

"Nice view....."

"Then get up already."

When I came to my senses, I saw that it was already bright outside. I always woke up before sunrise, so that meant I did sleep in a lot today.

"Nn? Huh, did you also just wake up?"

"That's why I'm here naked."

"Right, yesterday, no, today? Well, anyway, we did get a little too excited at night."

"....."

There was still some fire left in the fireplace. Because I added some more firewood when we boiled some water to wipe ourselves with hot medicinal water.

I slipped on my top which was lying haphazardly on the bed, and searched for my trousers.

"Sieg, please wear something. That's poison to the eyes."

I found my trousers and put them on. After that, I put a blanket on my wife who was sitting while hugging her knees.

"Sieg?"

"We didn't have our morning greeting yet."

"Greeting? Ah."

I remembered that I had yet to greet her, so I greeted her energetically like usual.

“Morning—, Sieglinde!”

“.....”

Sieg frowned and narrowed her eyes at me.

She didn't seem to like the usual greeting that I always had.

“Eh, it's no good?”

“No, there's not enough energy.”

Then what was the problem. I ended up asking her because I had no idea.

“.....There's the thing that we always did, right?”

“!”

Ah, the couple's greeting.

“Sieg, sorry. Not right now.”

“Why not.”

“I didn't shave yet. It's prickly.”

“I don't see any beards thought?”

“It does grow though.”

When I said that, Sieg looked into my face and touched my chin.

“It’s not that bad to be bothered by.....”

She was defenceless, and did not seem opposed to a kiss so I embraced her locked my lips on hers again.

The kiss gradually grew deeper and fanned us on to the next part.

.....In the end, when we came out to the living room, it was already the afternoon, but thankfully both Ruruporon and Miruporon acted normal.

The two of us reflected that such a thing shouldn’t happen again.



We still have work to do today.

We brought the dogs and went into the forest which now had a thin layer of snow.

When I blew the whistle and ordered the dogs, they ran out energetically.

Sieg and I leaned against each other in the shade and waited for the dogs to find prey.

After a while, the sounds of dogs barking could be heard. Sieg and I split up and hunted prey.

The dogs chased two rabbits.

I shot the one at the front, and then Sieg shot the next one.

She hunted pure white polar rabbits.

“These are nice rabbits.”

“Maybe we should grill them on skewers.”

“Sounds nice.”

Still, they needed to be matured, so it will a few days later.

“Let’s finish up for today.”

When I looked at Sieg, she was slinging the gun over her shoulder while saying, “Alright.”

Inside the bag, there were pheasants and rabbits. When we return, the pheasant will be stored in the icehouse and the rabbit will be left at the hut with some ice on its bellies.

Since the prey we hunted few days ago was ready, I suggested that we have that for dinner today as we arrived home.

Like so, our hunting life in the snow country continued.

We spent the warm days joyfully, as we always did.

The Snow Country Life of the Northern Nobleman and the Raptor Wife — fin.